AARDVARK-VANAHEIM/WIN-MILL PRODUCTIONS
FOLLOWING
CEREBUS
#2
$3.95
"Passage"
comic story!
Dave Sim
interviews
Barry Windsor-Smith!
Storytelling
in Cerebus!

Editorial

Following Cerebus #2 is finally here. Late, yes, but here. Some readers wondered how, if Dave Sim and Gerhard could produce a monthly comic book on time year after year, we managed to be late on our very first issue out of the gate! We could go through all the reasons, but, really, you don't care about them, do you? Or that we still aren't caught up with this issue? Or that issue 3 won't come out until February (instead of the original plan of January)? Or that our plan is to be back on track with issue 4 (in May), with issues coming out quarterly (and on time) thereafter?

Sim has emphasized to us what we already knew—that maintaining a regular, dependable schedule is important to the success of a magazine, especially a new magazine. We're hoping that the wait is worth it, and, if it's any consolation, we have thrown in *sixteen* extra pages over the past two issues (which were advertised as forty-pagers but grew to forty-eight pagers each), and next issue you're going to be getting a triple cover that folds out to display three magnificent parody covers based on iconic comic illustrations throughout history (*Weird Science-Fantasy* 29 by Frank Frazetta, sometimes called the greatest comic book cover ever; *Avengers* 4 by Jack Kirby; and *Detective* 31). So we think everyone's getting their money's worth.

The publication of the first issue of *Following Cerebus*, in addition to being late, also became an adventure in itself, with all kinds of weird glitches mysteriously appearing—the most peculiar of which is the "Aardvarl-Vamajeo, Win-Mill Productions" publisher notation at the top of the front cover! Some readers thought it was some weird joke that they didn't quite understand. Actually, when we sent the cover off to the printer, it read, "Aardvark-Vanaheim/Win-Mill Productions." When the cover proof came back from the printer, it read, "Aardvark-Vanaheim/Win-Mill Productions." But somehow, between the final proof stage and the actual printing stage, it transmogrified into "Aardvarl-Vamajeo, Win-Mill Productions." How is that even possible? Nobody seems to know. Aardvarl isn't even a real word!

(continued on page 40)

Following Cerebus

Vol. 1 #2 December 2004

Following Cerebus **produced by**

Craig Miller

&

John Thorne

Cerebus **comic book by**

Dave Sim

&

Gerhard

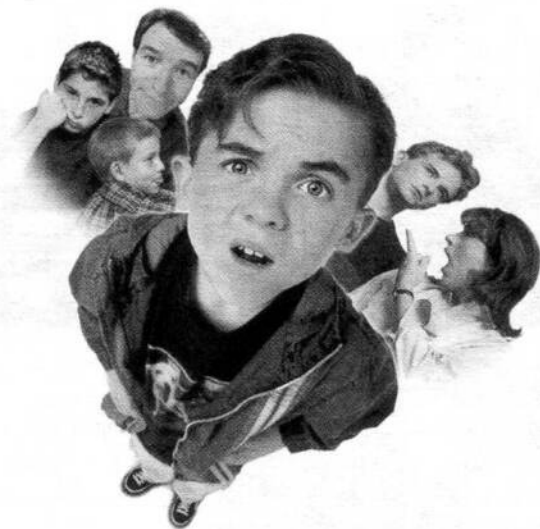
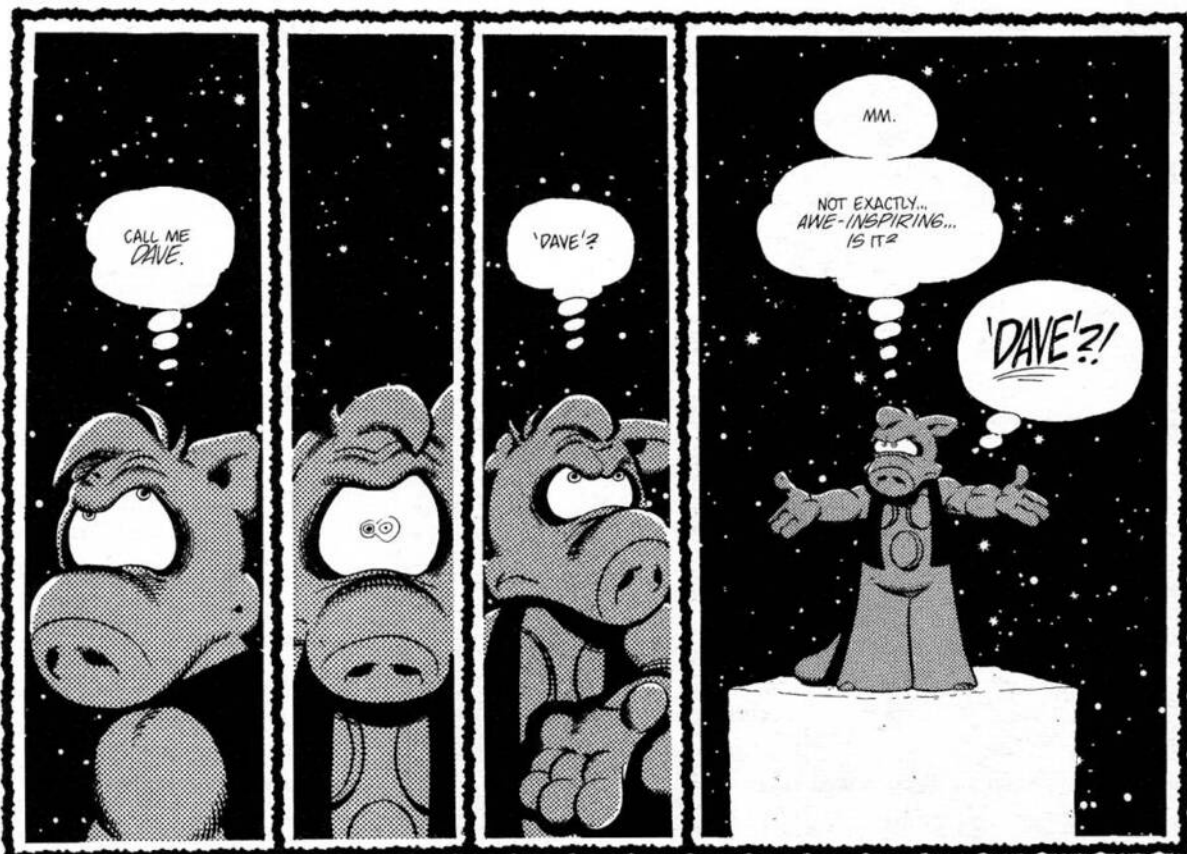
FOLLOWING CEREBUS, Vol. 1 #2, December, 2004. Published by Win-Mill Productions, P.O. Box 1283, Arlington, TX 76004. Phone (817) 274-7128. Craig Miller, Publisher. Price $3.95 per copy in the United States. Published "quarterly." Printed at

Pretense and Truth:

The Challenge of Dave Sim's Storytelling

Arguably the most critical moment in the *Cerebus* narrative is when Dave Sim enters into the work as a character. Up to this point, the reader is enjoying a story that occurs at another time and place (albeit with satirical references to present-day events and individuals), but the entrance of Sim himself in *Minds* forces the reader to approach the story in an entirely different way. For some, it diminishes the story—Cerebus and his world become more trivial as the work itself acknowledges that the story is the invention of an author who stands outside the work. For others, Sim's entrance introduces larger themes than the book had exhibited to date. But either way, the reader's relationship with *Cerebus* is irrevocably altered.

The entrance of an author into a work, or a work's reference to itself as an artifact, is nothing new in and of itself, though the technique is usually associated with lighthearted entertainment, not significant projects addressing grand themes. A famous Daffy Duck cartoon, *Duck Amuck*, features the animator's pencil or brush regularly entering the frame and changing the events to allow for more humorous situations. In the classic eighties television program *Moonlighting*, David Addison (Bruce Willis) regularly broke the "fourth wall" to address the TV audience directly, even as he was in the midst of an action scene and trying to solve a crime. (Currently, *Malcolm in the Middle* uses a similar technique to good effect.) And every older comic book fan remembers Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko occasionally dropping in (or being referenced) on Fantastic Four or Spider-Man stories in the sixties.

The surprise with Sim's use of the technique in *Cerebus* was that he'd spent more than a decade (out of a twenty-six year project) developing in astonishing detail an entire world in which his characters lived—detail that included more than superficial changes in scenery, but the more subtle aspects of the various societies such as their different economic, religious, and political systems. With all of these in place, and the reader submerged in the "reality" of this world, why would Sim enter the narrative and essentially remind the reader that he (Sim) was making all of it up, that it was all just a story? What could possibly be the

Top: Malcolm in the Middle. *Above and facing page: scenes from* Cerebus *193.*

A scene from Cerebus *200*

advantage of doing something that might cause the reader to disengage with the work and be unable ever to return again with the same kind of emotional investment?

Clearly with a work as well-thought out and complex as *Cerebus*, and a creator as careful as Sim, the potential payoff would have been considered worth the risk. Likewise, the payoff would have to be something extraordinary, not some minor silliness for the sake of a simple joke.

In a nutshell, what does storytelling mean when the storyteller himself enters the narrative and essentially becomes a character in his own story?

The Communication Model

Sim's presence in the story—as well as his references to readers—represents his acknowledgment and presentation of a communication model. In such a model there is an author, a medium, a message, and an audience. Sim is alone in his room writing and drawing *Cerebus;* many copies of this comic book are printed; then, later, the reader sits alone in his room reading it. The only thing connecting Sim and the reader is the story (or message) contained in this physical *thing*, this paper and ink (the medium). What *Cerebus* was doing—and Sim worked at it in a number of different ways—was to pull down the curtain and acknowledge that "I'm Dave here writing it in this room, and you're there reading it, and this is what we're reading." The introduction of a communication model into the actual Cerebus narrative is an explicit acknowledgment that what we, the readers, are reading is fiction—something "not real," and something arbitrary.

When the curtains are pulled back, Sim makes us re-evaluate what we've read. We have to re-orient. We have to start thinking about the story in an entirely different way. Why is this? After all, we implicitly know it's an invention when we pick it up. We know we're going to enter into a fictional realm. We "suspend disbelief" (as the cliché goes) and allow ourselves to become emotionally involved in the characters and events. We know that ultimately, what any author of fiction is doing is playing with an audience. He's manipulating us. Some might argue that the best storytellers are good liars—they are not presenting actual events, but made-up scenarios that must be convincing to readers. A good storyteller must seduce a listener or reader (admittedly a willing participant). This process has been the subject of debate for thousands of years. In *Preface to Plato*, Eric Havelock writes,

> Plato characteriz[es] the effect of poetry [and storytelling] as a "crippling of the mind." It is a kind of disease, for which one has to acquire an antidote. The antidote must consist of a knowledge "of what things really are." In short, poetry is a sort of mental poison, and is the enemy of truth....Plato winds up his argument: "Crucial indeed is the struggle...to keep faithful to righteousness and virtue in the face of temptation, be it of fame or money or power, or of poetry—yes, even of poetry."

Is storytelling the "enemy of truth"? Interestingly, Sim has described his work on *Cerebus* as his search for truth, but things did not begin to coalesce in this regard until after Sim had entered the narrative and dramatically altered the reader's relationship with it—more specifically from a more emotional involvement to primarily an intellectual one. When a narrator enters any narrative, the reader's emotional involvement evaporates. We no longer have as much care and commitment to the characters and the story. We now have an involvement with the narrative. It's not

an involvement with the fiction, it's with the narrative—with the actual *structure* of the story. Our other emotions are gone, and our intellect has kicked in.*

This aligns nicely with Sim's emphasis on the superiority of reason over emotion. Meanwhile, the story's emphasis on God and the creation of the universe—that is, Sim's relatively straightforward presentation of his understanding "of what things really are"—might appear to put *Cerebus* in Plato's good graces. After all, as the story moves along, it acknowledges its own illusory nature and at times becomes a virtual non-fiction explication of Sim's beliefs.

However, Sim's role as an ethical storyteller might be more complicated. According to Wallace Martin's *Recent Theories of Narrative,* "For the ethical critic, the writer's acknowledgment that he is 'just pretending'" (and that's what Sim is doing by entering the narrative—acknowledging that *Cerebus* is all a pretense) "is taken as evidence not of seriousness and sincerity, but of frivolity, gameplaying." Martin writes:

> The difficulties that theorists and critics encounter in dealing with complex metafiction are conceptual or ethical. "Fiction" is a pretense. But if its writers insistently call attention to the pretense, they are not pretending. Thus, they elevate their discourse to the level of our own: serious truthful discourse. For the ethical critic, a writer's acknowledgment that he is "just pretending" is taken of evidence not of seriousness and sincerity, but of frivolity, gameplaying, literary hijinx. The writer's duty is to pretend seriously, not to say, seriously or playfully, that it is a pretense. What is at stake here is a whole system of traditional distinctions between reality and fiction on the one hand, and truth and falsity on the other.

If Sim's intent is to talk about the ideas of emotion and reason and the engagement with and of your mind, then for him to enter the narrative is a huge risk, because a lot of people could perceive his efforts exactly the opposite: the readers may see *Cerebus* as something trivial.

In the book *Atonement* by Ian McEwan, the reader gets about two-thirds through the story before discover-

*In Wallace Martin's book *Recent Theories of Narrative* is a section titled "What is Narrative?" Narrative is the *way* you present a fictional story to someone. You decide to show them these events, but not these. Skip ahead and flash back later. That's narrative. Narrative is the way a story is conveyed to us. The author has control of the narrative. The reader does not. The reader engages in the narrative and begins to try to make sense of it. For example, in the last episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* Buffy walks into a room and says, "Does everybody understand the plan?" We (the audience) aren't told what the plan is and the characters go on about their business. About fifteen minutes later, the show flashes back to Buffy describing the plan. The narrative is constructed in a way that we are engaged with the story. The author of that narrative, Joss Whedon, knows what the plan is when he's writing that scene, but he makes sure not to reveal it to the viewer. That's the difference between fiction and narrative. (The fiction, if we put it all together, is, Buffy had to go kill a bunch of vampires, and she asks her powerful witch friend, Willow, to make everybody a vampire slayer.) How does a storyteller tell a story? Through a narrative.

Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar, center), with Willow, Spike, Faith, and the gang, coordinate their attack. From "Chosen," the series finale.

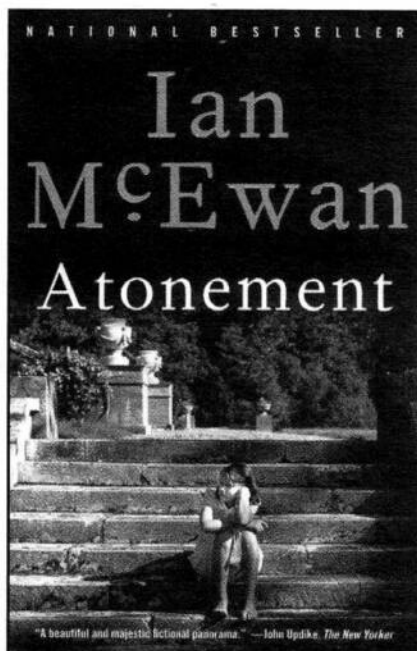
ing that this first part of the book (what they just read) is actually a story-within-a-story. The second part of the book—a kind of epilogue—is told from the perspective of the author who wrote the first "story." The epilogue is still fiction, but now the reader is forced to take a step back (the same way the reader was forced to do in *Cerebus*.) The same question arises: why would an author invest so much time in writing a story that's engaging a readership, only to acknowledge *within the story* that it's an invention? It's easy to feel a little tricked. "Wait a minute. Now I have to re-orient. I have to start thinking about it in a whole different way." And that's the key—the story gets the reader thinking instead of just reacting emotionally. But there is the sense that the author is toying with the readers.

There's no subtlety to what Sim did in entering the story. We may be engaging with *Cerebus* intellectually, but once we realize Sim is in the story, we can never remove him from it. He is now a presence in the *whole Cerebus* story, even those earlier issues and books in which he had not yet appeared. All of *Cerebus* changes once Sim becomes part of it. Our emotional engagement with the fiction is gone, because he acknowledges that it's fiction.

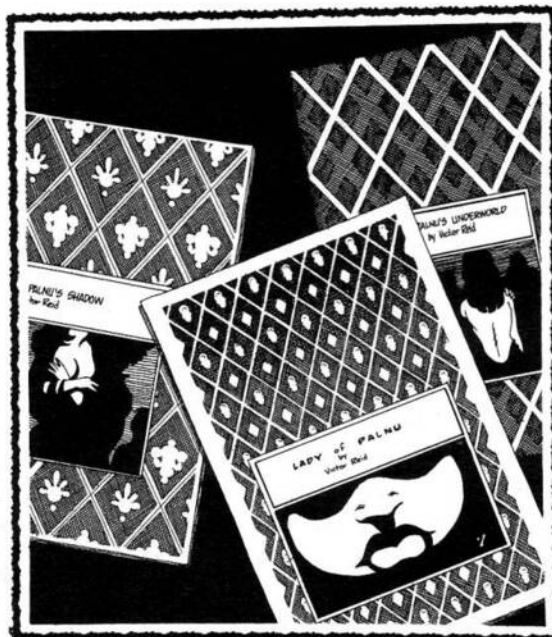
If the three-hundred-issue *Cerebus* story exists to engage us intellectually so that we start thinking about (among other things) the idea of reason versus emotion, the best way to do this might be to hook readers emotionally at first—get them wondering, "What's going to happen? Where are these characters going? Why are these characters behaving this way?"—and then pull the rug out from under them so they'll start to engage their minds. But has Sim played fairly with the audience? Has the book become trivial? There's no point in getting worried about the politics of Estarcion, because they don't mean anything. Nothing matters in the hermetically-sealed world of *Cerebus* any more, because it's all just a pretense. Sim acknowledges it.

On the other hand, Sim provides a way to see the way fiction works and how readers engage with it.

Readers and an Author in the Story

Sim creates a scenario in which *we,* the readers, are, in a manner of speaking, in the story. At first, the story is out there, and we're sitting somewhere reading it. We're getting caught up in reading about this other time and place. By the time of *Reads*, however, Sim is making references to himself and the readers. Suddenly we were *all* in the same place. When Sim does this he acknowledges that storytelling does more than simply entertain; it is an act of communication and a shared journey in the search for truth.

The reader of *Cerebus* was always part of the project, of course. We bought the comic, and we sat alone (usually) and read it. But we didn't have any control or impact on the story other than the binary choice of whether to read it or not to read it.

Eventually, however, the reader seems to become a more active participant. Sim creates this impression in a number of careful and explicit steps. In *Reads*, he makes reference to the reader when he mentions that he's going to end the story at 200, and that "the reader" is "caught off balance." And we, the readers, think, "Yeah, we *are!*" What Dave is saying about what is going through the reader's mind is exactly what is going through *our* minds at that moment!

Clearly that reaction could happen only during the first reading; during subsequent readings, we aren't surprised. But Sim makes an explicit reference to the fact that there's an audience reading the story and that there was a creative process at work—there's the story itself, his writing

An illustration from Cerebus *175*

A scene from Cerebus *200*

the story, and other people reading the story. Most stories don't acknowledge the second two parts. Occasionally you'll get an acknowledgment of a writer. But suddenly in Cerebus is an acknowledgment of readers, too. In effect, Sim makes the readers characters just as he makes himself a character. Significantly, Dave Sim does not appear first as Dave Sim. He appears as fictionalized versions of himself, Victor Reid and then Viktor Davis. Likewise, we don't appear as ourselves; we appear as other characters or other "acknowledgments" within the story. The reader is a collective character, an essential "presence."

In *Reads*, there is an author character who seems to be standing outside of the *Cerebus* comic and who has been placed into this other, textual section. When this happens, the story takes a step out—the Victor Reid character represents an author, and the reader character represents the reader. Here, Dave Sim is starting to work with the idea of how someone creates something, and how someone else engages or reacts with that something.

But then, in *Minds*, we see a bolder and more dramatic step *further* out of the text. Here, a character named "Dave" comes onto the page and says to Cerebus, "I created you." What's more, we actually see him drawing a *Cerebus* page. This character is no longer Victor Reid or Viktor Davis—this character is very likely supposed to be Dave Sim.

Of course, the "Dave" character isn't *actually* Dave Sim. It *can't be* Dave Sim, because what we see is on paper—there's no flesh-and-blood being coming out of the comic pages. But there is little distance between this representation of "Dave" and Dave Sim, himself, because it's Dave's voice that's apparently entering the narrative and talking to Cerebus.

If you read a column in the newspaper by a columnist, and he writes, "I went down to the restaurant the other day, and I forgot to leave a tip," and he tells you a little story, an anecdote, you take it on faith that the story is true and the way you read it is the way it happened. But we're never going to know *exactly* what happened unless we could be in the mind of every single person, and we could see the incident from every single angle. Yet, we know when we read that column that the writer is telling us something that really happened, and he's relating it in his own voice. We accept that what we're reading is a representation of that particular writer. It's pretty close. What difference is that from actually speaking to that writer? If he walked into a room and said, "I went down to a restaurant, I forgot to leave a tip, and here's the story that happened," our minds wouldn't be supplying the voice any more. We would actually be hearing it directly from him. This gets into the whole concept of the different media which are involved in communicating. In our second example, the mediation isn't happening through those words on the page but through the air as sound coming to us. But it's pretty close to the same thing. So we would argue that the Dave that is drawn and the voice that is used beginning around page 130 of *Minds* is as close as we can get—through the comic—to the real Dave Sim, who is producing that comic in Kitchener, Ontario.

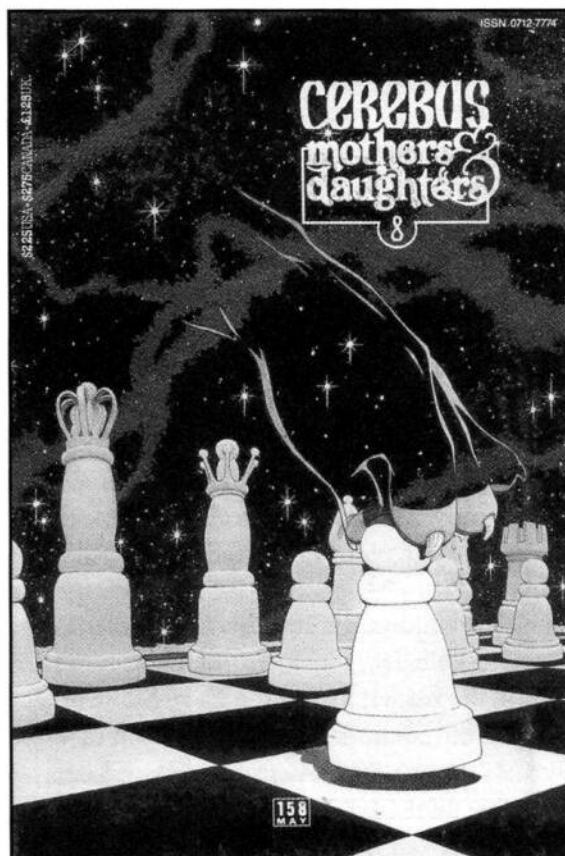
So now that we have a real Dave Sim, are we any closer to having a real reader inside the narrative?

Perhaps, but the reader who appears in the comic is still always going to be Dave Sim's *version* of the reader, just as the Dave Sim who appears in the comic is Dave Sim's version of Dave Sim. Naturally, Sim knows himself and can say what he thinks better than anyone else in the world. He can't know what all the readers are

thinking, however. But—and this is important—he can make a really good guess as to what we're thinking, especially when it comes to *Cerebus*.

The Value of Pretending Seriously

Sim's acknowledgment of *Cerebus* as fiction within the fiction moves readers from an emotional to an intellectual engagement with the story. This may or may not be more "ethical" (Plato and Martin appear to disagree), but at least it raises a question: is there a great value for readers to engage in fiction, to suspend, for some brief time, acknowledgment that what they are reading isn't "real"?

Absolutely. Fiction provides a safe environment for readers to think about ideas and viewpoints that they might not consider if they were being given to us from a documentary, or a news program or a political commentator. Let's pick an extreme example—let's say there's an author who wants to present a sympathetic view of Muslim extremists. The majority of the people in this country probably would not want to hear these ideas because they don't feel the same way. But it's easier to think about these ideas if they are told in a fictional story where two characters—say, two police officers in New York City—debate the topics. Perhaps one character has these extreme ideas, and he debates them with his partner. If these ideas are presented through an engaging fiction, where the drama is about whether the one cop can stay on the police force, the audience becomes involved with that fiction.

If the drama and the story are presented with some subtlety and nuance, it allows the audience to start thinking about things in a safe way. A reader might start thinking, "I see how that character has a point. I don't agree with him, but I see he has a point." Because these ideas were told through a story—through something fictional—they are presented in a non-confrontational way. This wouldn't work if somebody just stood up in public and started spouting ideology. But if it's done fictionally, there's a safety to it.

That's the power of fiction. When we're reading the politics of Estarcion, we know it's an invention. Any sane, intelligent person is not going to believe it's real. But it has a special function for us, because it allows us to engage a part of our minds, maybe in some ways like our dreams do. It takes us to a place that we might normally resist going, or we may not be able to go ourselves. But the fiction allows us to go there, mull it over, and dismiss it if we want. We don't necessarily go into fiction thinking it's a debate, that we have to prepare counter-arguments and keep our guard up. Ideally, we enter into fiction with an open mind—a *willingness* to hear another point-of-view. That's a great value of fiction, especially in today's polarized society. Too often we close our minds to other people's ideas before they even express them.

Some of the material Sim wrote in the text pieces in the back of the comics is polarizing; there's no longer that subtlety and nuance that fiction allows. Likewise, once a writer acknowledges the fiction within the fiction, readers become suspicious. They start looking for another agenda. Their willingness to hear is compromised.

When Sim addresses his themes in the "pre-Dave" portion of *Cerebus*, readers are less antagonistic to those themes.

No Going Back

Cerebus accomplishes much more than merely acknowledging its fiction to the reader or by presenting a communication model. Sim suggests that there was a *merging* of the message, the addresser, and the addressee. What started out just as an acknowledgment of the three became a layered chessboard picture of reality, in which Sim saw himself as a chess piece in a larger game. For him, that *whole thing*—the creator, the work, and the reader—was but another story in a *larger* chess game that he didn't quite understand but sensed was out there.

Eventually, as Sim notes in his *Following Cerebus* 1 interview, he replaces the chess analogy of reality with a simpler understanding that does not contain untold levels of larger realities between himself and an Ultimate reality, but merely

two levels, himself and God. However, that does not negate the chessboard aspect of the story and its effects upon the readers. At the moment Sim became an acknowledged, active part of the *Cerebus* story, the readers moved beyond emotional responses and started thinking about the nature of creation and creating—in this way, Sim's account of the creation of the universe mirrored his theme of the creation of *Cerebus*. By entering the narrative, Sim made us think about story *per se*, whether we wanted to or not. This, in turn, allowed him to address—in the comic—some of those issues he was discussing outside of the story (in the letters pages, editorial notes, and essays): emotion versus reason, gender differences, contemporary culture, societal trends, et cetera.

In all of these he was extremely successful in communicating his thoughts and analyses. But did this process of entering the narrative harm the first half of the story that he had spent over ten years developing? Once we're told within the story that we're reading fiction, the reader has a different kind of engagement altogether. Ultimately, at that point, can the reader see the project as anything more than an engagement about fiction, about storytelling, about the value of telling a story? Does that not become the overriding theme, subsuming all other topics? That's the real question that *Cerebus* brings to the fore, beyond the specific issues that Sim addresses. Readers fascinated by this exploration of metafiction were probably intrigued by Sim's entrance, while others may have wished for a return to the insular world created in the first half of the story—a world to which it was impossible for the reader to return.

CM/JT

Dave Sim on Telling Stories

To complement our storytelling essay, we asked Dave Sim to answer a few questions related to some of the issues we address (though not necessarily, as you will see, the specific topics on which we elaborate). We faxed the questions to him on October 27 (long after he should have received them).

FC: *How early in the series did you decide that you would enter the narrative as the Dave with whom Cerebus would speak?*

Sim: I'm not sure how *early* in the series I made the decision. The decision would have been pretty much implied when I introduced the idea of an omniscient being in the storyline (the Judge at the end of *Church & State*) while leaving hints that the omniscience being portrayed wasn't what it appeared to be ("I was cheering for Weisshaupt, myself"). The fact that I was doing that at the one-third mark of the story meant that I had a lot more climbing to do, and I think it would be a safe assumption—given that I was doing three hundred issues—that I knew that the Judge really constituted little more than a "first plateau" in the concept of reaching a satisfying resolution at the end of a six thousand page graphic novel. Being an atheist at the time, my assumption would've been that I was the only omniscient being in the *Cerebus* universe. Which I now view as silly. I take it as a given that God's knowledge of the *Cerebus* storyline dwarfs my own as God's knowledge of everything dwarfs my own.

FC: *This entrance created—at least for us—a dramatic shift in our relationship to the story (from a more emotional involvement to a more intellectual one). Did*

The Judge from Cerebus *107*

you intend for readers to have this—or some other—kind of shift?

DS: I can't say that I ever had any specific intentions relative to the readers. I'm not sure any writer worth his salt does. My goal with *Cerebus* was to put out an engaging package every month with some forward momentum to it in the hopes of arriving at some answers to large questions: so I was including everything that came across my path or that I had arrived at by logical deduction and incorporating all of them into the monthly package and the overall storyline as best I could while trying to be entertaining in the process. Basically I put a package together that interested me on the same basis that Stan Lee credits for creating *The Fantastic Four*—I'm going to create I comic book that I would want to read. If you're focused on the readers—as a plural manifestation of a singular reality—it seems to me that you're basically trafficking in the illusory and the hypothetical. That is, even if you're targeting some part of your work, mentally, to a specific person ("Wait 'til Alan reads this") the odds are very remote that it is going to connect in the way that you intend—a person's actual reality is very different from who you picture them to be no

"I take it as a given that God's knowledge of the *Cerebus* storyline dwarfs my own."

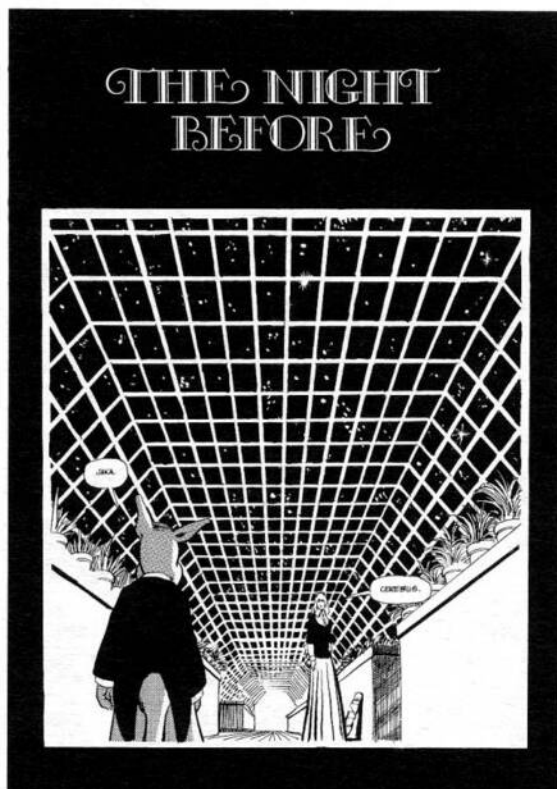
Cerebus and Jaka from Cerebus *36*

matter what it is that you're picturing—so all you're really doing is creating an illusory version for yourself of what is, in the first place, an imaginary construct of a real person, which means you're actually just addressing the material itself (and whatever hopes you have for it) but allowing illusions and false constructs to intervene in your decision-making. In my experience other people, however well-meaning, are only a distraction so—however multi-faceted and hypothetical—that was all the readers' reaction could represent, whether their reaction was positive, negative, or neutral.

I did take it as a given that the answers I was looking for could be arrived at only sequentially and logically, so it wouldn't surprise me if the effect you're describing was the net result: here I'm just having fun and goofing around, and over *here* I'm addressing the large questions. I think if you're predisposed to ideas and large questions, you'll just naturally know the difference when I make the switch. For those people who only regarded *Cerebus* as an entertainment and who wouldn't allow *Cerebus* to be anything else for them, like Peter David, bringing myself into the story past the halfway point—three thousand-plus pages—was a suicidal creative move because it pointed towards still larger questions after thirteen years of posing larger and larger questions. "Enough with the questions, already: tell funnier jokes." Obviously, for you the reaction was very different and more analogous to my own. How large a question can I pose and still have a chance of answering it? It's one thing to address the microcosm/macrocosm of creator and creation in a four-minute animated film like *Duck Amuck* or as an issue of *Animal Man*. To introduce the concept at a point where you are already setting a new world record for longest sustained narrative in human history every time you do another page and are past the halfway point to where you intend to get implies the intention to fry very large fish. Which—to my own satisfaction, anyway—I think I did. Battered, fried, and piping hot.

FC: *How important is it for a reader to be drawn emotionally into a story? Some parts of* Cerebus *have a huge emotional impact—for instance, "The Night Before," or the conclusion of* Jaka's Story, *or the retelling of the death of Curly Howard in* Latter Days. *How do you distinguish between legitimate emotional impact in a story and one that uses emotional effects simply to manipulate the reader into a particular response?*

DS: I'm not sure if by "you" you mean me specifically or people in general. From what I have been able to gather about the society which I inhabit, you (both people in a general sense and the readers of *Cerebus* who are likely to be read-

ing this) all believe that it is a given that emotion is the key to (if not the sum and substance of) virtually everything. Therefore I assume that your viewpoint (in that same general sense) of emotion-as-being-paramount would naturally include all forms of arts and literature. In my own case, I'm drawn to ideas, so I usually just see emotionalism in arts, entertainment, and literature as window-dressing intended to appeal to a wider (read: includes females) readership and, therefore, I'm usually admiring the technique of using emotion—whether it's striking true or false notes for me—while I'm waiting to see what the underlying ideas are that are being presented. Of course, I'm becoming more aware that that's largely a thing of the past the further from 1970's breakout of emotionalism in the form of feminism we get. Fewer and fewer works are being produced that contain anything that could even charitably be

Rick from Cerebus *136*

described as an idea. Or they have one idea that they regurgitate endlessly (strong, independent women *good!*). But mostly, Emotion "R" It.

As an example, I no longer expect to be presented with an idea by a movie, so I go and enjoy the pyrotechnical displays on offer for what they are. Seven dollars worth of CGI, Dolby stereo, and a series of disconnected scenes featuring dramatically enlarged moving images of actors and actresses. Shoot Britney Spears and Avril Lavigne trying on different outfits in front of a blue screen, and then drop in ninety minutes worth of Industrial Light and Magic stock effects and crank up the "tuneage" with some Beethoven or Wagner in Dolby stereo, and I'd consider myself to be getting more for my money than I'm getting now within the current frames of reference of what constitute a movie. I'm certainly aware that at one time there were sharp critical distinctions that were drawn between legitimate emotional impact, sentiment, cheap sentiment, and melodrama. I'm not sure that I understood those distinctions even from their dictionary definitions back when they

"Fewer and fewer works are being produced that contain anything that could even charitably be described as an idea."

had some application, and in a world such as we have now, I don't think the distinctions would apply.

James Turner asked Chet [Brown] a while ago what he thought about dueling (given that Chet is a libertarian). So Chet naturally asked me. I drew a blank. Where the masculine code of honour has disappeared, asking "what about dueling?" is like asking "what about a mastodon hunt?" In a comparable way, in a world drowning in emotion, distinctions between varieties of emotions tend to evaporate, and you end up with what we call society today: one big, undifferentiated boiling and roiling emotional stew. I read a recent review of Reality TV programs in general that pointed out that the Reality TV programs aren't actually free-form at all, but rather are structured in such a way as to lead to a happy ending. And obviously "happy" in the purely rhetorical female sense: where everyone is smiling, weeping tears of joy, and sharing a group hug. Fifty years ago that would have been dismissed as cheap sentiment. Just the fact of Reality TV's existence points to what I'm saying, I think: once you cross the line to the point where you not only dismiss ideas, but have no idea what ideas even are, entertainment has to erode into cheap sentiment. "Cut to the chase" sums it up nicely. If you don't have any ideas, just do one long chase scene. The next step is to have two hours of people doing nothing but smiling, weeping tears of joy, and sharing group hugs.

Of the emotional moments you describe in *Cerebus:* on the ending of "The Night Before," it was really my attempt to illustrate why Cerebus and Jaka weren't going to "work." Step 1: here's

anathema to happiness. It's really hard to tell where you would draw limits to the use of emotional effects in that construct. To the late twentieth century sensibility there was (and is) no such thing as too much boo-hoo-hoo, ha-ha, and wheee! It's like the difference between Kentucky Fried Chicken forty years ago and today. Wow, this batter is really good. So what do you do? You make the chicken virtually all batter, which results in what Colonel Sanders himself called late in his life, years after he had sold the corporation, a greasy mess. The next stage is to offer KFC batter on its own: Bucket o' Batter. Just as there is a difference between good southern fried chicken and a blob of greasy lard, there's a difference between good emotion and what our society is drowning in. Sorry about the profusion of food metaphors. Today is day fourteen of Ramadan. I'm afraid that—coming from the opposite side of the emotion versus reason debate from my society—that that's as close as I can get to providing you with an answer to your question, guys.

FC: *We distinguish between the* Cerebus *"story" and the* Cerebus *"project," which would include, for instance, the book annotations. Do you make any similar separation, or is it all a single whole? Do you consider the book annotations integral parts of the story—in your mind, when people read one of the books, they should read everything, start to finish—or are they more like the* Lord of the Ring *appendices—interesting for background information, but not essential?*

DS: It depends on what you're looking for. Before directly addressing the question of whether the annotations are separate from *Cerebus* or a part of *Cerebus,* Simon R. Green just wrote me a letter, where he mentions that there are some very likeable women in *Cerebus.* Well, of course. Women are very likeable. We wouldn't have nearly as many marriages as we do if women weren't likeable. Mary Hemingway is a very likeable person if you just take her at face value and don't ask any obvious questions. If you believe in strong, independent women as an inherent and irrefutable good in the way that a Christian believes in Christ as an inherent and irrefutable good, I think you'll genuinely love *Form & Void* and love the Mary Ernestway character. However, I would recommend that any feminist *choosing* to read *Form & Void not* read the annotations, because as soon as you read the annotations, you find out what I actually think of Mary Hemingway and women like her. See, the great thing that I discovered about feminists—and I'm reasonably certain that my audience is one hundred percent composed of feminists—is that you can go completely overboard with the strong, independent

Mary Ernestway from Cerebus *257*

woman, as I was able to do just using Mary Hemingway's own words: she was a completely over-the-top caricature of the strong, independent woman—and they'll still just take it at face value: What a great, strong, independent woman! For a long time, it fascinated me to see the extent to which I was getting away with it. And then there came this creeping "The horror! The horror" sensation when I realized what a trap that was in attempting to communicate ideas. None of my ideas were getting through, just the emotional cosmetics, the entertainment gloss.

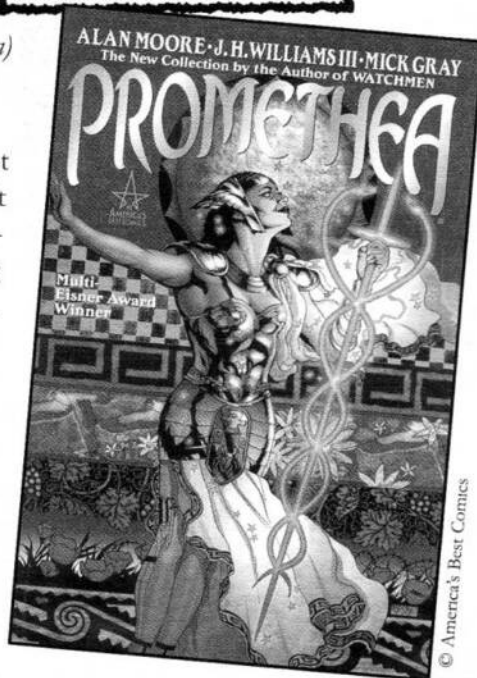
The distinction, it seems to me, is that while

"Women are very likeable. We wouldn't have nearly as many marriages as we do if women weren't likeable."

it's true that literature should function as entertainment, just being entertaining isn't enough to satisfy the requirements of literature. *War and Peace* is very entertaining. *The Idiot* is very entertaining. The difference between literature and entertainment is ambition, the interest in examining ideas and the human condition, in addition to making people go boo-hoo-hoo, ha-ha, and wheee! So that became the primary reason for doing the annotations: it was a reaction to the

Above: Mrs. Thatcher (with Jaka) from Cerebus *135. Right:* Promethea.

conclusion that I came to just prior to *Going Home:* I don't think *any* of the readers understand how much I'm putting into this *besides* boo-hoo, ha-ha, and whee!

I mean, as an example, I was really pleased with the way the Mrs. Thatcher sequence in *Jaka's Story* turned out, because I thought I presented the two viewpoints pretty effectively: law and order (Mrs. Thatcher) versus "do whatever you want and to hell with the consequences" (Jaka). But after the book had been on the market for eight years or so, it was pretty obvious that everyone reading it was just skimming the surface. Boo, Mrs. Thatcher, you're mean. Yay, Jaka, you're pretty and fun! You go, girl. It seemed to call for annotations at the very least.

"'All stories are true' is a skewed perspective on storytelling as being a foundational element for religion."

When you ask whether I think the annotations are *part* of *Cerebus,* I think I would have to put it at a remove from myself and say that I think *From Hell* is an amazing graphic novel that stands alone apart from Alan's annotations, but, personally, I couldn't picture re-reading it and *skipping* the annotations. It would be like missing a good part of the meal even though Alan and I couldn't be further apart in our ideas. At least Alan *has* ideas.

FC: *Are all stories true? What does that even mean?*

DS: My best guess about the "all stories are true" line is that it is a skewed perspective on storytelling as being a foundational element for religion: therefore constituting the raising up of the storyteller to a near-deistic or, possibly, deistic or even a (can't rule it out once they get on a roll) Deistic level. I'm not sure if it's of recent vintage or if it's been there festering below the surface of our society for generations and has only suppurated recently, but it seems to take as a given that all scripture is fiction, and therefore all scripture is just strangely co-opted storytelling. Some Bronze Age chap wowing his mates around the campfire telling them stories about the Adventures of God and/or YHWH, and that's where God came from. Questions about whether there was an historical Moshe or an historical Jesus issue from the same impulse: the idea that they were made up the way that Thor and Odin were made up, which means that there is no difference between, say, Alan Moore and Matthew, Odin and Jesus. Matthew made up a character named Jesus, and Alan Moore made up Promethea. They're just different stories.

It seems to me that Alan weds this to the idea that the impulse towards gods is just a part of our brain that's dormant for the most part and that we can create gods just by giving that part of our brain a good workout with lots of amazing drugs and tantric sex and magic rituals. I would assume, as an example, that Alan believes that Promethea exists because he wrote some stories about her and that therefore there is no distinction between Promethea and Mary, the mother of Jesus, let's say.

The strip that Linda Medley did for *The Comics Journal* in the aftermath of 9/11 seemed cut from the same cloth: the idea that "we are the

storytellers, and we must tell nicer stories that people can believe in" —presumably as opposed to, say, the bad stories in the Koran that make you fly planes full of people into skyscrapers full of people—that seemed to indicate that in Linda Medley's mind the storytellers are leading the parade. Which I find a very creepy prospect even as I realize that it makes sense of the obsessive and unhealthy interest leftists appear to have in movies as shaping political reality. *Fahrenheit 9/11* was more important to most leftists than the Democratic National Convention. They really seem to believe that the way to lead is to create movies that tell people how to think, how to vote, and, most particularly, how to feel.

Or, to skip to another wrinkle on the blanket which is perhaps tangential to that, as Neil Gaiman said in an interview in *Speakeasy* back in the late 80s or early 90s: "I'd hate to exclusively believe in one thing, because that would rule out so many other things." Assuming by "one thing" he means God, it's certainly an interesting viewpoint on which to be staking your immortal soul. Of course I have no idea if that's *still* Neil's viewpoint, but it's certainly a common viewpoint and seems to open a pestilential can of worms centering on the word "believe." I mean, I believe in God and pray to Him five times a day, which I certainly consider a more sensible choice than praying to, say, the Bottle City of Kandor or to Alan Moore's snake god or to George Lucas, which is why it doesn't bother me that choosing to pray to God eliminates praying to the Bottle City of Kandor or to Alan Moore's snake god or to George Lucas as options. I assume that those people who think God is just another story don't actually believe in anything in the sense that they see God, Alan Moore's snake god, and George Lucas as being, at essence, interchangeable.

So you end up with these degrees of belief where, at one end of the spectrum, prayer is replaced by "thinking good thoughts" about friends, family, magic crystals, Promethea, Diana, Princess of Wales, the Wal-Mart shopping gods, the traffic gods, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin. And at the other end of the spectrum by believing that all that is required to make actual gods of any of those entities is to conceive of them as existing on a deistic level, and that's all it takes: instant deity. All stories are true. I could never communicate adequately how unwise a choice I think

"The *Cerebus* story ends in issue 200 in the sense that he won't let go of Jaka ."

those choices are when you have God, the Torah, the Gospels, and the Koran, but I guess, at the point of greatest reduction, you can at least say that it demonstrates conclusively just how wide-ranging human free will is when an immortal soul is at stake and the extent to which God allows everyone to believe exactly what they want to, to their own benefit or detriment.

FC: *Does the* Cerebus *story end in issue 200? 300? Both? If issue 300, was the "ends in 200" bit in issue 183 simply a tease of joke? Or was this a hint that there really are two "endings"?*

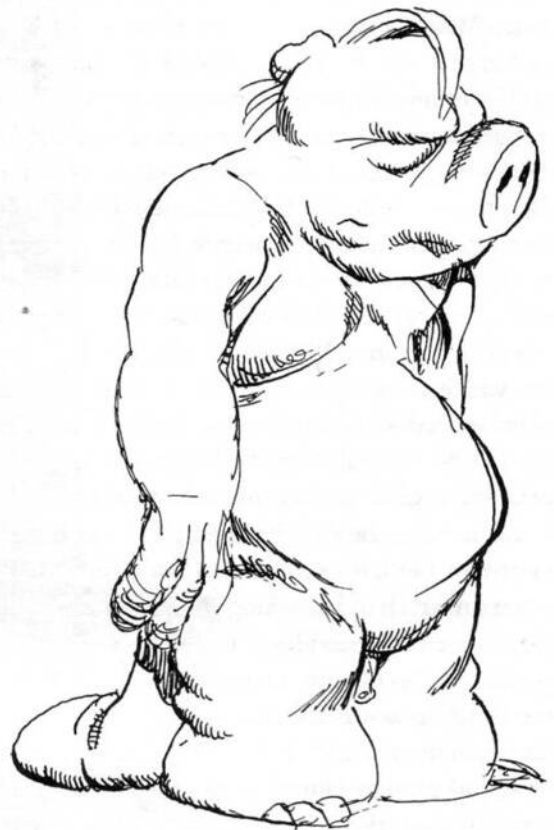
DS: The *Cerebus* story ends in issue 200 in the sense that he won't let go of Jaka and won't see who and what Jaka is, so whatever progress he is able to make through the rest of his life is severely limited compared to his potential. There is the rising action from 111 to 200 which is fitful but largely along a straight line, a vector and largely vertical. From there it's all ricochet. He's going to live a long time, so he has to end up *somewhere*, but the somewhere is really irrelevant after issue 200. Through his choices, he forfeits his chance to be a major catalyst in the history of his time and his world and becomes, instead, just a minor functionary. Get him to write down the dream that he had and hide it in the fireplace so that someone useful and with a functioning brain and a sense of proportion can find it umpty-ump number of years later. Reminds me of the Pink Floyd "Wish You Were Here" line: "Did you exchange a walk-on part in the war for a lead role in a cage?" To me, yes, that's exactly what Cerebus did, which is why he ended up the way he did.

Mind Games

Write to us at:
Following Cerebus
P.O. Box 1283
Arlington, TX 76004

e-mail:
editors@followingcerebus.com

We'd like for our letters column to return next issue, so send us letters!

Gallery

BETTER YOU SHOULD JUST LET HER GO TO HER GRAVE WITH ALL HER CIRINIST GARBAGE LOCKED UP INSIDE HER
OH, BUT WAIT 'TIL YOU HEAR, FATHER
HER PLANT EXPERIMENTS ?
744-5571
Strike Rite Matches Ltd. London, Canada
COMIC BOOKS
NOW & THEN BOOKS
103 Queen St. S.
Kitchener, Ont. N2G 1W1
Close Cover Before Striking

why they aren't working now. Cerebus has already become absorbed in a self that isn't really him and which is anathema to Jaka—he has moved from the drugged state he fell in love with her in through who he was and out the other side into an economic and political careerist. The literary point that interested me was how short a time that took, given that Cerebus is perceived to be this rugged "take no s**t" individual and barbarian. By the time Jaka shows up, he might as well be a garden variety bureaucrat manipulated by those around him. "High society" as societal narcotic.

The conclusion of *Jaka's Story* was the abortion debate. He wants the kid, she doesn't. How do you resolve that? "Not happily" is, unfortunately, the only conclusion the readership seems to have drawn from it. To them, it's unhappy

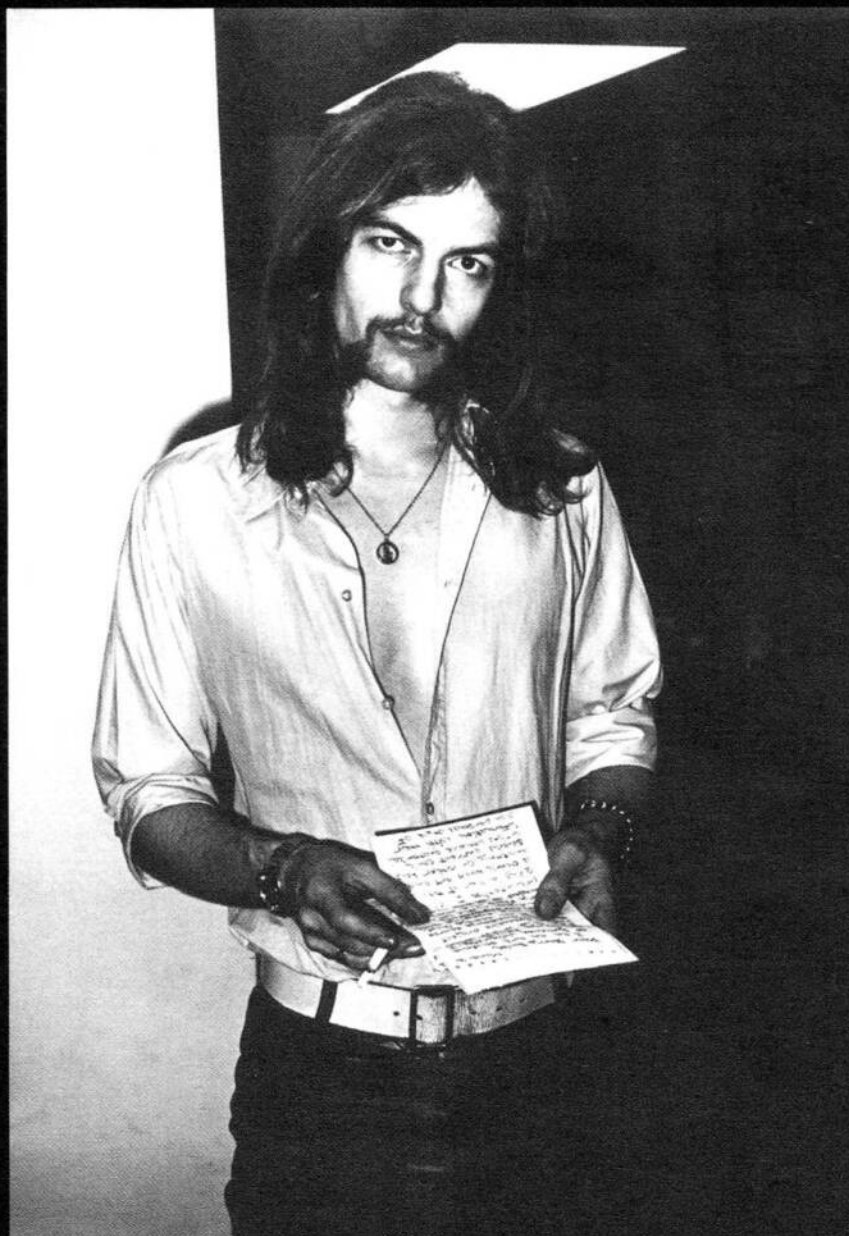
"Emotion [is] leading people in inherently false directions."

that Rick and Jaka split because of the events in the story, and that's the end of it. Boo-hoo-hoo. Case closed. But that certainly wasn't the full extent of what I was doing or attempting to do in writing the story the way I did. The question still remains: he wants the kid, she doesn't. How do you resolve that? See, to me, it's a matter of presenting the material and leaving it to the reader to examine the morality of it. Where did the sequence of events go wrong, and what could've been done to have them work out better?

The death of Curly Howard, to me, was the story of Moe and Curly's relationship and Moe's deciding that HE was the Three Stooges. That, to me, was really bad. That was an unethical choice. The boo-hoo-hoo comes in when Janie, Curly's daughter, is quoting Curly as saying "I hope Janie—in life—does what makes her happy, because I've found what makes me happy, and that's the most important thing in the world: to do what makes you happy." And I wrote that down right away when I heard it on the *A&E Biography* episode on the Stooges. I know a great boo-hoo-hoo line when I hear it. And, of course, it works like a charm: Boo-hoo-hoo. It's a great boo-hoo-hoo line, but it's also transparently false, and the fact that it's transparently false but is treated as optimally true by emotion-based beings is the actual idea that I'm trying to get across: the flaw in attempting to conduct the world's or individual lives on the basis of emotion. "That's the most important thing in the world: to do what makes you happy." Shoot up with heroin. You'll be amazed how happy you get, right away. But, obviously heroin is a bad choice. Curly's whole life was nothing but bad choices that he made because he thought that what he was choosing—booze, broads, nightclubs, late hours, multiple marriages—was going to make him happy. He learned *nothing* from the stroke. My assumption is that every decision that you make on the basis that a) something that makes you happy is a good decision and b) something that doesn't make you happy is a bad decision is going to lead you—can lead you nowhere else *but*—onto a very strange and self-destructive roller-coaster of a life. Boo-hoo-hoo. Wheeee! Boo-hoo-hoo. Wheee! From my limited exposure to the world, that seems to sum up the extent of the "thinking" that goes into it. There is no thinking, just experience. Boo-hoo-hoo. Wheee!

So, on the one hand, I had the problem of seeing emotion as leading people in inherently false directions and attempting to sell a story that pointed that out to an audience that implicitly believed—and I assume still believes—that emotion was the only valid basis for decision-making and who considered thought to be complete

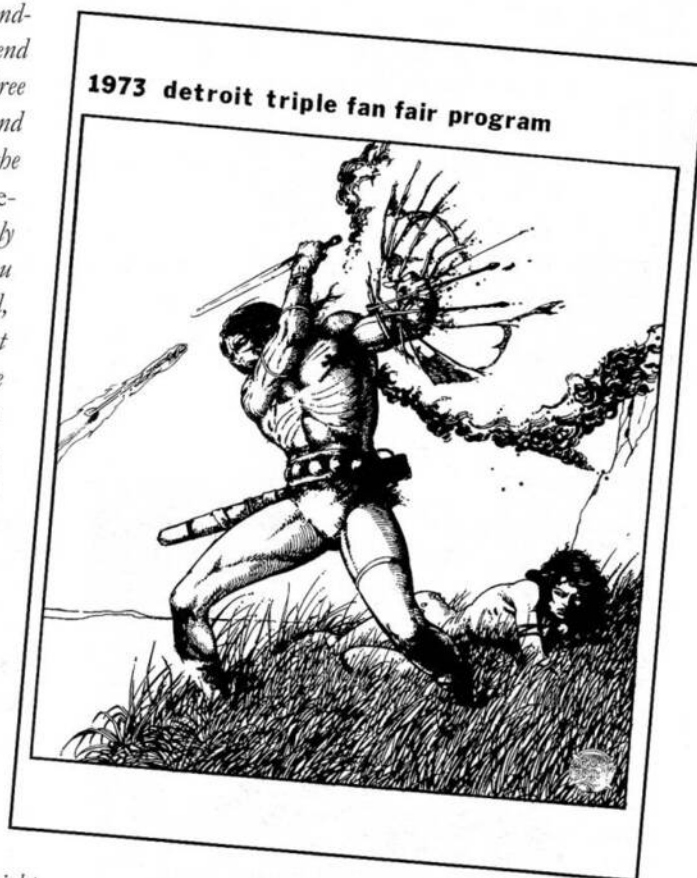
Koshie (Curly Howard) from Cerebus *279*

Dave Sim interviews Barry Windsor-Smith (1973)

Before the Hyphen, Before the Windsor
An introduction by Dave Sim to his 1973 interview with Barry Smith

Word swept quickly through the dealers' room that occupied most of the mezzanine floor of the downtown Detroit Hilton in the early afternoon hours of the October 1973 edition of the Detroit Triple Fan Fair ("Fantasy Literature, Films, Comic Art"). Some idiot attending one of the three fund-raising auctions that weekend had bid (here my memory fails me: two hundred? Three hundred?) dollars each for an hour of Barry Smith and Michael Wm. Kaluta's time. I was with John Balge, the publisher and editor of Comic Art News & Reviews (CANAR), *then in its second year of monthly publication, part of the—depending on how old you are and how far back you want to go—second, third, or twentieth waves of fanzines (fan magazines). At the time, for me, conventions meant a heavy schedule of interviewing, both for the* Now & Then Times *and* CANAR. *The latter's monthly frequency was a particularly voracious consumer of material (I tried to supply John with one interview per issue), so a major convention like the Triple Fan Fair could give me a three or four month backlog, depending on the number of guests and their willingness to be interviewed. So far I had "gotten" Gil Kane and Russ Heath, and John and I had been in the hotel soda fountain just finishing lunch when a tall bearded fellow with his long hair tied back in a ponytail walked in and sat opposite us, manhandling his huge portfolio into a safe place in front of his stool.*

"You an artist?" I asked (I was unusually bright for a seventeen-year-old). "Yep." he allowed. "Who do you draw for?" (expecting a list of fanzines and semi-pro venues). He smiled. "Oh, you know. Marvel, DC, National Lampoon. *The usual." I made the connection quickly. "You're Mike Kaluta." John and I made arrangements to abduct him after lunch. Gil Kane, Russ Heath, Mike Kaluta. Mike Kaluta was an especially hot property at the time, in the midst of working on his legendary run on* The Shadow, *whose legendary third issue (the one inked by Berni Wrightson) was the latest installment then on the newsstands. In fact he had with him the entire penciled and lettered and partly-inked issue four...*

(which everyone in the legendary Saugerties, New York comic book community—Steve Hickman, Wrightson, Jeff Jones—had been pitching in on. There was one panel of a gangster with thick round glasses holding up his right hand, on which Berni Wrightson had inked the thumb and little finger. Having just showed him some samples of my own work I pleaded with Mike Kaluta to allow me to ink one of the three remaining fingers. No go. He had been most encouraging in telling me "You're on the right track. Just keep going," but clearly meant that I was to keep going on my own, not on his Shadow *pages.)*

I had also approached Barry Smith in the dealers' room. The second part of his "Red Nails" adaptation had appeared in Savage Tales*—one of Marvel's earliest experiments at doing an "edgier" black-and-white comic book in magazine format—that month and was attracting even more attention than his run on the monthly* Conan *comic had been doing, particularly as he had just announced that he was through with Conan for the time being. "Mm. Maybe later," he said, effectively dismissing me.*

So John and I happened to be wandering past the Wayne Room where the auction had been held and heard someone say, "That's him. That's the guy." And here comes Harry Kremer, owner of Now & Then Books,

Michael Kaluta art on *The Shadow* 4 inked by Berni Wrightson and others—but not by Sim!

Facing page: Windsor-Smith at the Marvel Comics offices in 1973. Photo by Vince Colletta from *OPUS Vol. 1* (see pages 24-25 for more information). © Barry Windsor-Smith.

looking as if he had just gone through a meat grinder, perspiring, hair askew, counting what remained of his US cash reserves. John laughed. The idiot was our idiot. I rushed up to him. "Harry! I get to interview Barry Smith." Unhappily, this is how all Now and Then Books hangers-on tended to put our requests to Harry. It wasn't until several years later when I had become friends with Gene Day that he managed to persuade me what a good guy Harry was. Harry? A good guy? Gene was right of course and from then on, I broke ranks with the universal consensus here in town that Harry was an idiot and the appropriate butt of everyone's jokes.

"Fine, fine," he said, amiable and agreeable as always.

So that was how I ended up back in the hotel soda fountain (in the tables and chairs area this time) with Barry Smith, Mike Kaluta, Harry, John, Barry's then-girlfriend and soon-to-be business partner Linda Lessman...

(the most beautiful woman I had seen up close at the tender age of seventeen. At that time she was a colorist for Marvel Comics, and I made a point of asking her if she would write an article on comic-book colouring for CANAR *even though I wasn't the editor—largely just to establish any sort of contact with her. She ordered a hamburger rare. Very rare, as I recall. "Yes. Warm it between your hands," Barry Smith, rather dryly informed the waiter.)*

Above: a Sim illustration accompanying the original publication of this interview. Sim writes, "The photo on page 16 is what Barry Smith looked like when I met him at the Detroit Triple Fan Fair that year. I don't think I did a bad likeness, my first time out on the BWS inking style. But I took an awful ribbing from a Toronto cartoonist who will remain nameless: 'Jeez, Dave. It's Barry Smith. Not Ted Nugent.'"

And it was on that comedic note—with Mr. Barry Smith and Mr. Michael Wm. Kaluta bent over their respective pads of typewriter paper lightly penciling away at their respective drawings for Harry Kremer—that I switched on my portable tape recorder and asked my first question.

Sim: *Do you think it is possible for a hero or character to be popular only when handled by one artist, for example your work on* Conan?

Windsor-Smith: Yes, I do. I do think it is possible.

DS: *Could anyone have handled* Conan?

BWS: Yes. I mean, haven't all the popular strips been handled by somebody else at one time or another? *Spider-Man* is still popular, and John Romita's been drawing it for about ten years now.

DS: *Would you have liked to have selected someone else to take over* Conan *in your absence?*

BWS: No, I really can't think of anybody I would have liked to have do it, aside from myself. As the Conan I drew, I can't think of anybody I'd like to have replace me. John Buscema's Conan is a different kettle of fish entirely. But I could never have made a choice. Personally, I think my work made the *Conan* feature. I don't think it would have been as popular if John Buscema had started it off, or somebody like that. I think it still sells because the readers saw the growth thing, saw it get better. It made them feel like they were a part of it, which they were, of course.

DS: *Did you pay a lot of attention to the letters you got regarding* Conan?

BWS: Oh, yeah. There was this one marvelous guy by the name of Tom Stankie who used to write every month very long, intelligent letters with tremendous insight, and I used to value his opinion greatly. I used to wait for Tom Stankie's letters to come. I never knew the chap. And then he faded out; we haven't heard from him since. I always wanted to write him or find out where he is. I wanted to give him some original artwork. He was such a good critic. But he just went away, and I don't know what happened to him. He was the best comic critic I've ever read in my life. I've still got all his letters or copies of them. Yeah, I was really interested in what the fans thought.

DS: *How do you see your artwork now as opposed to your early efforts on* Nick Fury *and* Daredevil?

BWS: I find no comparison between my early work and my real work. The early work, not that I knew it at the time, was that Jack Kirby "thing." I was really very heavy into Jack Kirby. It wasn't just to get a job. I thought Jack Kirby was the "end." I thought he was the ultimate comic artist. I've since felt differently. Maybe a year ago I

just became myself more or less. There is really no comparison. It's just like the difference between telling a lie and telling the truth. The comparison is so intense that there is no comparison. They're two different things.

DS: *Who influenced your art on* Conan?

BWS: Art nouveau for the page layout and panel design. Notions, good notions from art nouveau. The backgrounds were mostly art nouveau. Later on in *Conan* most of the influence came from the Pre-Raphaelites. English painters. Again, it is not obvious; you'd have to look very closely at the Pre-Raphaelites to find any comparison. But I did apply a lot of Pre-Raphaelite techniques to comic books. At least I tried to.

DS: *What were the circumstances surrounding Marvel's use of your uninked pencils in one of the Conan issues [#19, "Hawks From the Sea"]?*

BWS: It was just a big mistake. Dan Adkins was supposed to ink the strip and, I forget exactly what happened, the pages got lost in the mail or something, and they got to him far too late for him to ink them. So John Verpoorten, the production manager, told him to send them back, and they would get them inked very quickly in the office. The idea originally was that there was to be something like an assembly-line of inkers working all night on the thing headed by Frank Giacoia and Gourge Roussos and stuff like that, which horrified me enormously. So I talked them into publishing it from the pencils, which in retrospect wasn't such a bright idea because I thought it came out awful—the reason being that it was pencils, and I hadn't imagined it being printed from pencils. It was such a complex piece of work. It was all very light drawing, which you just can't print from for the most part. Accordingly, when I colored it, we had to use yellows and pinks and colors like that, because if we put, like, blue on it, it would just obliterate the drawing entirely. So the coloring looked awful. Trying to compensate for the lack of black was awful anyway. In general it was just a pretty rotten-looking book. I tend to scrutinize my work harder than most people would, and when I got the proofs, I just thought, "Oh God, this is awful, this is awful!"

DS: *What is the appeal of Conan to the average reader?*

BWS: I think the appeal is in the character, which had nothing to do with me. Conan was invented before I was born. The character is the thing—that he doesn't take any s---. This may sound kind of stupid, but I think he's a good hero for today, because he's right down to earth. He won't take any crap from anybody. We realized later on that it was really lucky that we brought out *Conan* at the time we did, that we did it the way we did, that we gave him all that character, where he wouldn't take jive from anybody. That applies to both the reader and the heavy fan, the heavy appreciator.

Right: an example of Alphonse Mucha's (1860-1939) art nouveau work. Below: Ophelia *by Pre-Raphaelite artist John William Waterhouse (1849-1917).*

DS: *Considering your problems at Marvel, do you think a drastic change is necessary in the comics industry?*

BWS: Yes, I do think a reform is needed. Drastic, I don't know. Drastic measures never seem to come off. If you do something fast and furious, it never seems to have much holding power.

DS: *Can the Academy of Comic Book Arts (ACBA) bring about change?*

BWS: Not at the moment. They've been in busi-

Windsor-Smith's uninked pencils from Conan 19

ness for a few years, and they haven't yet. I think that the only thing that will really change or reform that particular situation is pressure from a very strong individual or individuals, but not from a group like ACBA. ACBA right now is a very wishy-washy organization. I don't know of anybody who thinks ACBA is anything really marvelous, who speaks of it in whispers. It's just a group of guys who had a pretty "flash" idea and let it slide. If they prove me wrong, I'll be more than happy, but I think ACBA stinks. I thought I'd say that once in an interview.

DS: *Would you consider going back to Marvel?*

BWS: I would consider going back to Marvel if they gave me back my artwork without a sneer, gave me reprint rights, asked my opinion of what they should do with my work, how they should process it to turn it into a comic book; if they gave me a lot of control over what happened to the book that I was producing, like editorial decisions, odd corrections, which I had, but they were never nice about it. They only did it because they knew I'd kick up a stink if they didn't tell me that piece of artwork was going to be corrected. They only let me correct my own stuff so they wouldn't get hassled. It wasn't that they were afraid of me; it was just that they didn't want me to go through the business of me slamming my fist on the desk. So, I would like it done with a bit more

"I find no comparison between my early work and my real work."

respect.

DS: *Is the idea of not giving reprint rights and returning artwork editorial or that of the publisher?*

BWS: Entirely the publisher's.

DS: *Did you ever have a confrontation with the publisher, or did you always go through editors?*

BWS: Well, Stan Lee is now publisher, and I had some really heavy confrontations with him. I could just go on for hours about those.

DS: *What do you think of Stan Lee's approach to promoting Marvel, the "Mighty Marvel's on the Move" attitude?*

BWS: Stan is still in the mid-sixties. He doesn't realize it is 1973. He's really living in the past. I've said a number of rotten things about Stan, but they all seem to be pretty well true. I think anybody with a reason for verbalizing it would agree with me. Anybody who works for Marvel would say the same thing. He's living in the past. He's working in the past and thinking the same way. And all of his little promotional gimmicks just tend to bastardize what could otherwise be a very good medium.

DS: *What approach is needed in the seventies?*

BWS: If there was a different approach in the seventies, it would come about and take hold, and it would be such that you would look back in the eighties and say, "Yeah, that's what happened in the seventies." You can't predict or preplan anything of the nature of an approach. At least I don't think you can. When Marvel was at its height in the mid-sixties with Kirby and Stan and Steranko and others, where Marvel was the best thing going, it wasn't planned. You couldn't plan such a thing like that.

DS: *Should artists have more control over the final look of a story than they have now?*

BWS: I think the artist should have—this depends on the artist, of course—more control, but you have to examine single cases. If you have an artist who is an intelligent artist and who has insight into the field and what should be done and even how to sell a book, getting down to mercenary things like that from the nice aesthetic things like good looking artwork, then the editor should say, "This guy can do it as well or better than we can. Let's all work together." Unfortunately, at Marvel—I don't know about National [DC]; it's probably worse at National—when they're called editors or associate editors, they change and try to be "flash," sort of thinking they're something important even though they haven't any more talent than anybody else. Most times they have much less talent, otherwise they wouldn't be editors, they'd be artists. I just wish everybody was a little more open-minded and didn't have such big egos that they have to hold their positions and protect them, as if they're going to lose their editorship if they let an artist do what he wants to do.

DS: *At the 1972 Toronto convention, Neal Adams said, "Publishers are stupid; nice, but stupid." At the 1973 convention, James Warren maintained that he was neither nice nor stupid. What is your opinion?*

BWS: Well, I'm not a great authority on comics

publishers. To make a huge generalization like Neal did is a bit worrisome. I really don't know. I just know one publisher, Stan Lee, who really isn't a publisher. He's just playing at being a publisher. They're their own people. I know nothing about them. I could generalize and say they're all idiots for not doing better things, but Neal Adams can say that. You don't need me to say that.

DS: *Joe Kubert has said, "Maybe we get a little too much involved in just turning the stuff out, rather than really paying attention to what we are turning out." Is anything going to change that situation?*

BWS: Well, that's Joe Kubert, and maybe some other bloke he knows. I wouldn't say that. The only people I really mix with are people who are into comic books. I don't mix with people who are not involved in what they are doing. Maybe if I knew someone very well who didn't pay attention to what they were turning out, I might say, "Maybe we get involved in just turning the stuff out," because I'd be thinking of someone else. But the people I know are the people who try hard to make the books good.

DS: *What do you think of fans?*

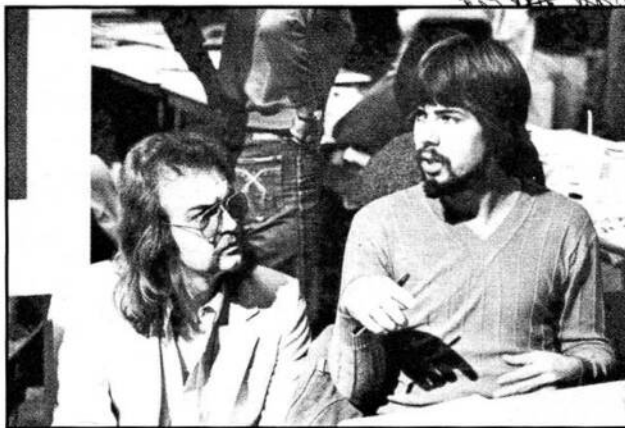
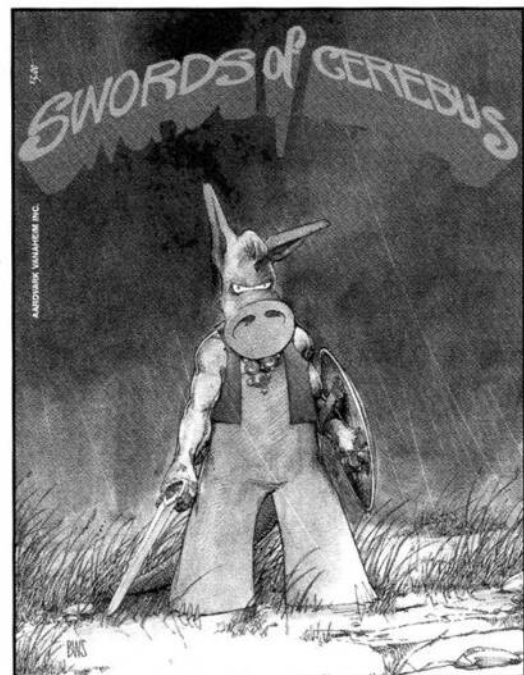
BWS: It's like with publishers. They're their own person. I've found an awful lot of incredibly obnoxious fans knocking around. I've also found some very nice fans. I don't think there is an average fan. It's like finding an average person. How do you define average?

DS: *Do awards like the ACBA Shazam and the fan awards serve any purpose?*

BWS: Well, fills up a little blank space on the wall.

DS: *Did you get a raise when you won the award?*

BWS: No.

DS: *Do you prefer working for black-and-white or color books?*

Above: photo from the inside back cover of Cerebus *34. The original caption read: "Dave Sim, his drawing hand paralized by an offer of a cover-painting for* Swords of Cerebus *Volume 4, tries to string enough words together to make a full sentence. Barry Smith looks on in puzzlement as he tries to fathom the meaning of, 'Cov...Cover...p...painting...? Dah! Daah! Daah!'" It ended up being the front and back covers of* Swords of Cerebus *volume 5 (seen at right: the final front cover and uncolored back cover), which also included the only solo non-Dave Sim Cerebus story, "Cerebus Dreams," written and drawn by Barry Windsor-Smith. Photo by William C. Johnson.*

BWS: Preferably color, because I like to color. I think Conan is better in color. The reason I'm doing black-and-white is because I refuse to work on the color books again. I said that when I quit. I said, "I'll never draw another color comic book

"[Conan] is a good hero for today, because he's right down to earth....He wouldn't take jive from anybody."

for you again, unless you do something nice to me." So I'm just sticking by my word. It anguishes me at times, because I really like color comic books when they're colored right and when they're printed right. Black-and-white can be a bit tedious unless it is done very well. I can only do black-and-white well when I'm given the time to think about it. So I would prefer to draw color comic books. I would prefer to draw *Conan* monthly and in color—pencil, ink it, color it, like I used to do. But I can't do that just out of pride.

DS: *What's the reason for the success of horror and sword-and-sorcery comics in an industry that just a few years ago seemed to revolve around the "superhero with problems" that Marvel introduced in the sixties?*

BWS: Well, you couldn't go on with the superhero with problems forever. The industry needed a change. No, the readers needed a change, and they got it. They got it with *Conan*, and it was a success. And everybody else followed suit, including Marvel itself. They started copying their own creation with Thongor and stuff like that. It was just a very prime time to bring out something with a new look where the hero spits on the ground and pees behind a tree.

DS: *A good portion of the Conan stories seem to be hinged on violence. What purpose does violence serve in the comic book story?*

BWS: I suppose it is a great deal of the comic book story, one has to admit. It's not really violence though, is it? Like when Jack Kirby has Orion punch a guy and you get a zillion flash lines, how do you call that violence? There is very little Violence in comics, if you ask me—that is to say, Violence with a capital V.

DS: *Should violence be portrayed with the effects of the violence?*

BWS: Absolutely. I think if a guy gets shot, you should show his guts all over the floor to show how rotten it is to get shot. One shouldn't do it as a lesson for the children. "See what happens when you shoot someone." It should be just plain common sense. Don't show a bunch of flash lines that come from nowhere, go to nowhere, and don't do anybody any harm. I just like honesty.

DS: *What restrictions are necessary for the overground comics?*

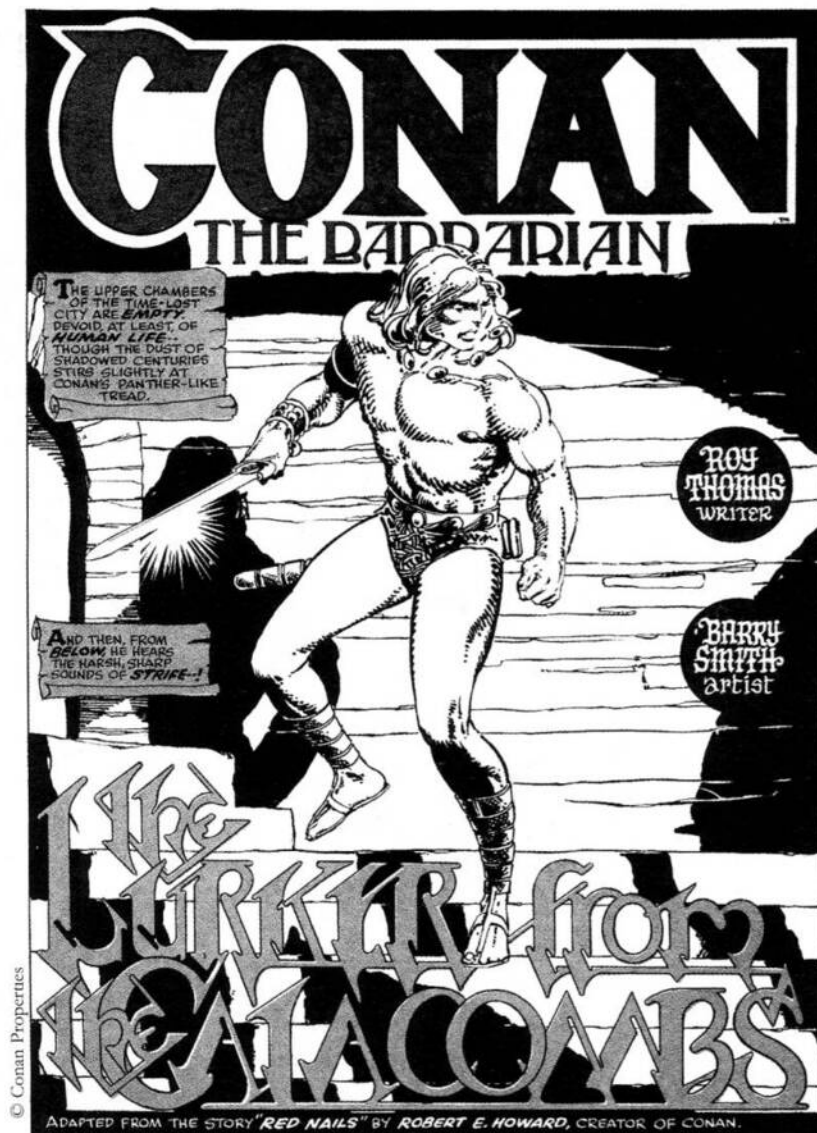
BWS: None, except for good taste.

DS: *So you would say that there is no need to "protect" anyone who buys a newsstand comic book?*

BWS: If you've got good taste, there's nothing to protect them from, is there?

DS: *Most early comic artists got their inspiration from illustrators like Burne Hogarth, Alex Raymond, and Hal Foster. Doesn't imitation of these people make today's comic art a rather diluted form of certain schools of illustration?*

BWS: What's so good about illustrators? Just because he's called in bleedin' illustrator doesn't mean he can draw better than anybody else. Just because he's got a flash name like illustrator, [and] I'm a comic book artist, what's the difference? If a guy can draw, he can draw. I know very few illustrators today who can hold a candle to quite a few comic artists I could mention. Just because they're called

British comic weeklies Beano *and* Dandy *from 1965*

Windsor-Smith's classic art from the "Red Nails" adaptation (1973)

illustrators, big deal! I think there is a lot of natural and good talent in the comic book industry, and all this copying of other people's styles really doesn't affect it at all. If a guy is an artist there, he's always going to be an artist. He's always going to improve and get better all the time.

DS: *What is your opinion of the British comic weeklies?*

BWS: I read a long article in some fanzine, written by one of the guys who works in British weeklies, which was lengthy put-down of comics, and the last sentence was, to wrap it up, "English comics are nothing like American comics as much as French fries are nothing like meat. Just because they're called 'comics,' why do they have to compare with each other?" Those British comics go out to five-year-old kids, and those kids dig them very, very much. I used to dig them. They're nonsense publications. They're intended to be nonsense. Half the editors are idiots. But the British comic weeklies have a value only in what they are—things like *Beano* and *Dandy*. I mean, I have very fond memories of *Beano* and *Dandy*. There's no comparison, as I say, between that stuff and this stuff.

DS: *What is the potential for the British comic book industry?*

BWS: The British comic book industry is about fifty time larger than the American comic book industry. It puts out twice as many titles. Most of the British comics are printed by IPC (International Publishing Corporation), which is the biggest publisher in the world. They are operating under full steam, so you've got to realize they are making a mint over there. They've a bigger industry than the Americans will ever have, just because they know how to sell the books to five-year-old kids. So they produce the stuff for five-year-old kids. They don't get into anything arty or anything clever. It's all just asinine, very low-grade humor, very low-grade cartooning. There is nowadays in English comics (I know a couple of people who work in the English comics; a couple of them are my closest and dearest friends) a change happening where artists and writers are trying to make it more adult in their own way. They're not trying to copy the American way at all. But if you have ever seen "The Spartan" by Frank Bellamy, there is nothing in American comics that can compare with it. Scriptwise, it was pretty good, but not great. Artwise, there is nothing to equal it. And it came out eleven years ago, when I was a kid. I defend English comic books, even though I would never work for one. I don't work for them, but I'll defend them to my dying day, because I know the insides of their business. One of the heaviest guys in British comics right how is a guy by the name of Chris, who's one of my best friends. And I know what toil he goes through just to get a seemingly stupid script. He really has to apply himself, because the guy is an intellectual. His walls are covered with books several inches thick, and he's read every one of them. He's got more insight into comic book art than anybody I know, and yet he writes silly stories like "Biffo the Bear" or something ridiculous like that. He knows what he's doing. He's pro. Some day, perhaps British comics will be like American comics. If so, I hope they will retain their own integrity and their own personality.

our grand vizier shalt be oh-so PLEASED--
when he spies our MISCHIEF 'pon this EVE!

Passage

We present a rare story from the past (featuring the first appearance of the black vest)!

The story "Passage" first appeared in the second issue (Apr.-June, 1981) of *Cerebus the Newsletter,* the official publication of the Cerebus Fan Club. On the inside front cover, editor Fred Patten wrote,

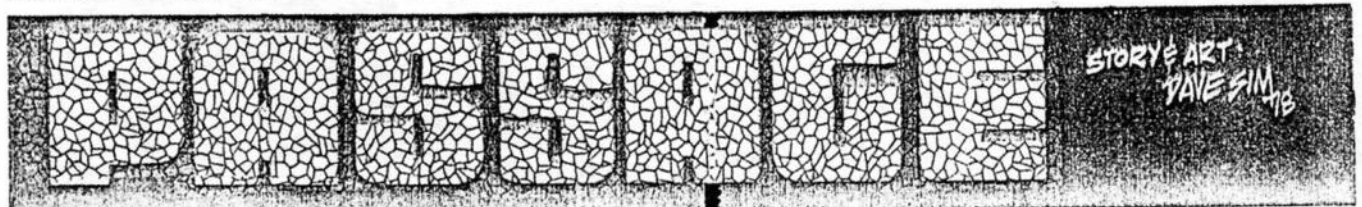
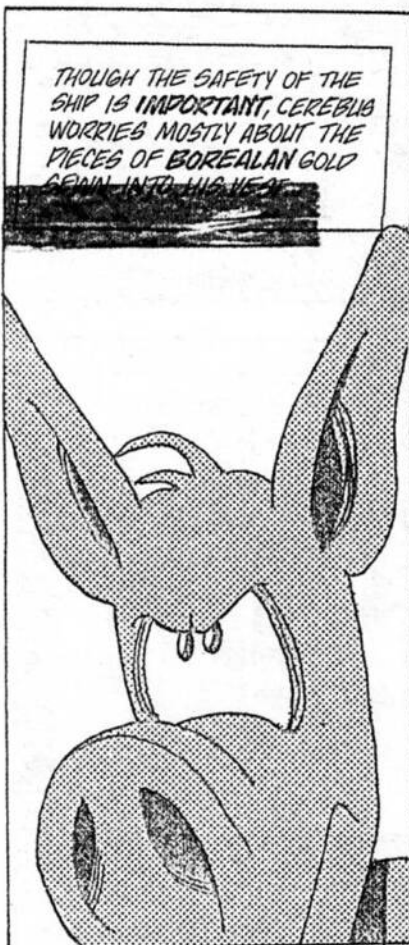
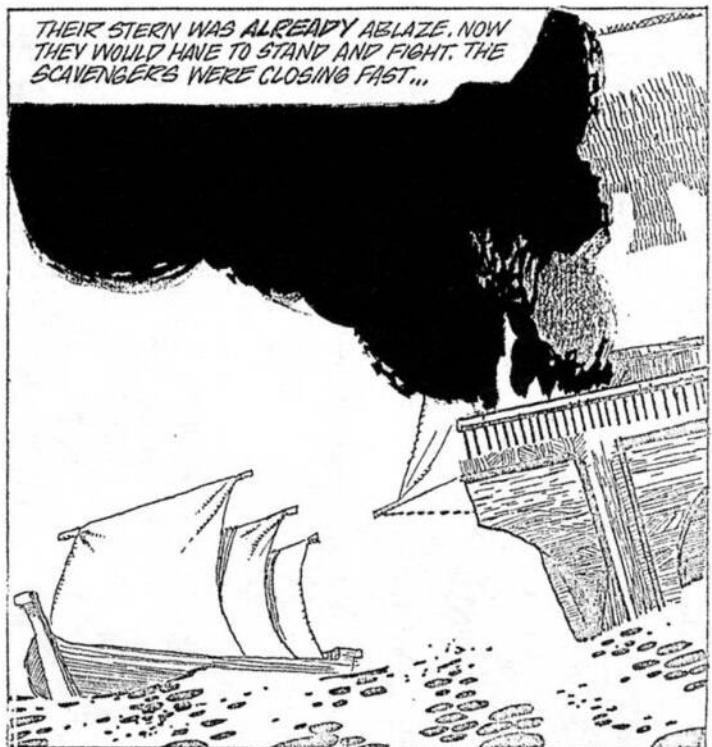
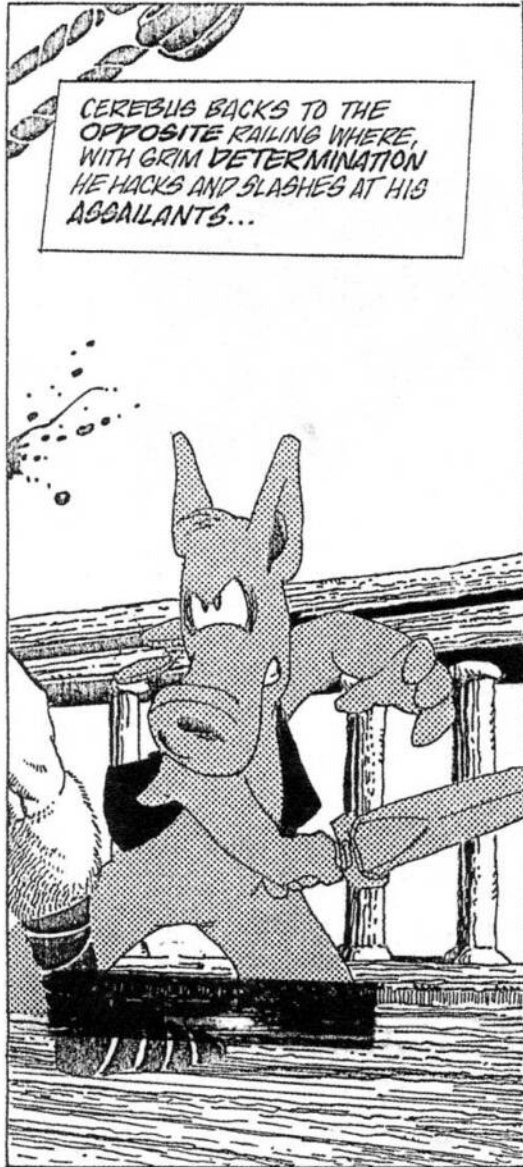
> *"Passage" was drawn almost three years ago, just after* Cerebus *#4 was finished. It was sent to David Cothran for his magazine,* Faerie Star. Faerie Star *was never printed, and Cothran disappeared without returning "Passage." After so long, the Simses [sic] have given up hoping to recover the original art. Their only copy was a very poor Xerox, far too bad for professional publication. A patchy attempt was made on the first couple of pages to ink in the faded Xerox areas.*

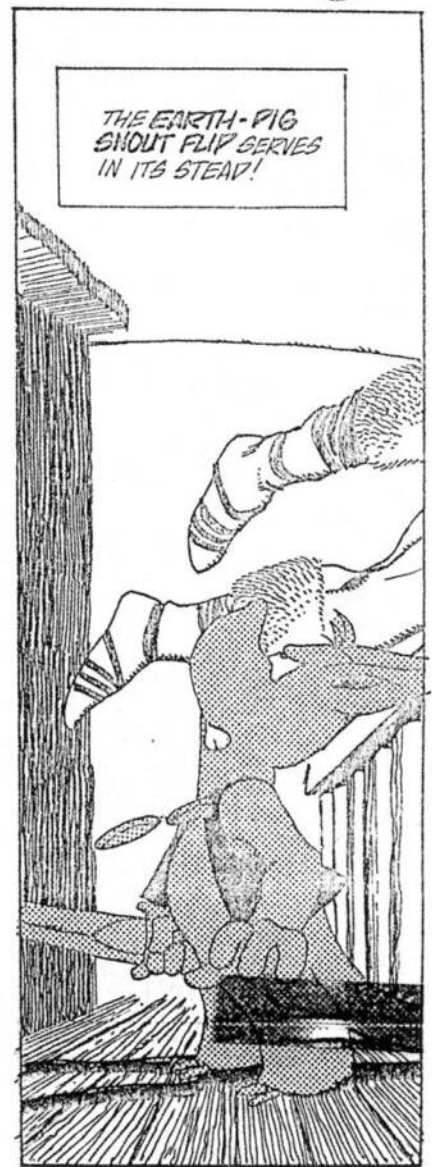
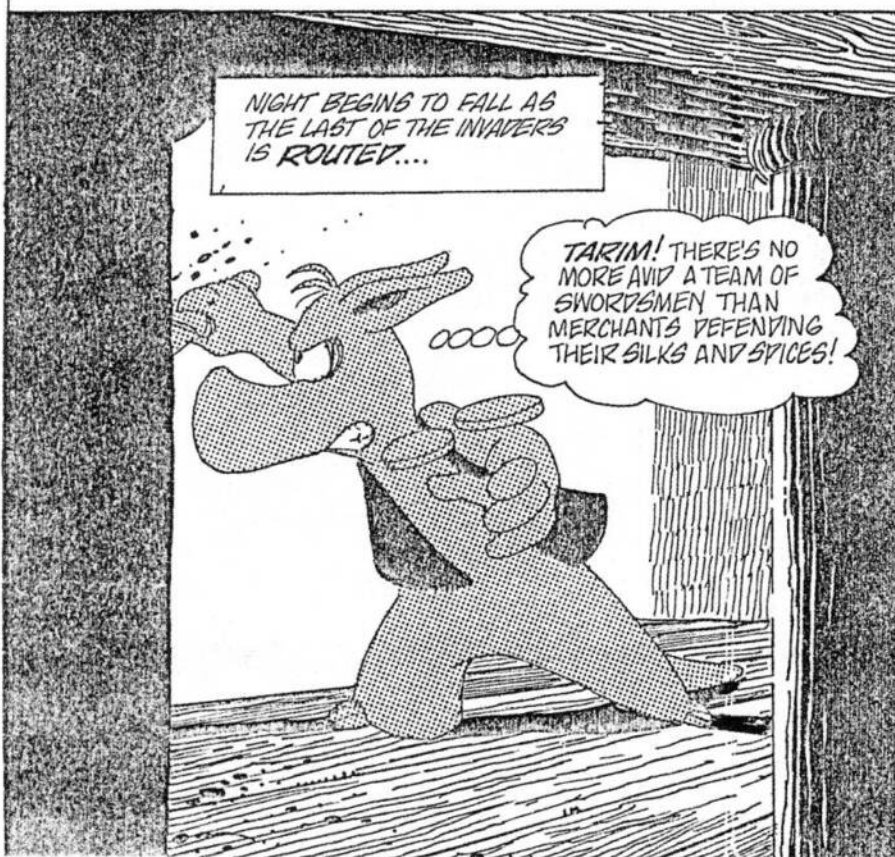
I must not have been paying very close attention at the time to what I told Fred (or, more likely, what I had Deni relay to Fred), but I'm quite certain that the story was drawn between issues 3 and 4, not between issues 4 and 5. As the introductory caption to issue 4 (informing the reader of what has taken place since issue 3) reads: "Using Henrot's gold, Cerebus bribes his way onto *a merchant vessel on the Sofim River...*" (emphasis mine). I wasn't exactly a *scholar* of Robert E. Howard and Conan, but I was aware of the controversy—as regards the sequence in which the Conan stories took place—that has swirled around them since REH wrote them, so once I knew that I was past the three-issue trial period I had given *Cerebus,* I was very careful to maintain the sequence of the completed stories both on paper (avoiding backtracking in the chronology on the outside stories that I did—since the story for *Faerie Star* was the next thing I had to do after issue 3, I set the story on the Sofim River between Tansubal, the locale for issue 3, and Serrea, the locale for issue 4) and in my mind. I maintained that forward momentum for pretty close to eight years until Ger and I did the Young Cerebus stories in *Epic Illustrated* and *Cerebus Jam.* It took me a little longer to get used to Cerebus referring to himself in the third person, and you'll notice he refers to himself as "I" and "me" several times in the course of the story.

The story was intended for *Faerie Star* No.2. *Faerie Star* No.1 actually did come out in 1977 with a story I had drawn from a Charlie Thompson script called "The Captain and the Sorcerer" as well as a Cothran story that Gene Day drew and I lettered called "Hobo Dreamer," a Gene Day solo story called "Paper Dragon" that I lettered, a John Cothran story drawn by Earl Geier (who works at Graham Crackers Comics in Chicago now) that I lettered, and Giovanni and Tom Kirby's "The Unbeliever" that I lettered. It also included strips by Ken Raney (the reigning BWS clone at the time in the small press) and an early Will Meugniot story called "Cleopatra's Cat." I actually got paid for my pages and for the lettering in issue 1: in 1977, $5 January 14, $11 February 25, $58.38—twenty-five percent of what I was still owed on May 9, a $30 royalty payment on November 24. Issue 2 was the problem, including a story I had drawn by Michael Loubert called "Ambuscade," for which there are no surviving copies.

It's true that David Cothran disappeared without a trace and the original artwork with him. The quality of the photocopies can be attributed to the quality of the photocopier at the Kitchener

The final page of Cerebus *3*

CEREBUS

Note: the dark streaks across the centers of the pages are pieces of yellowed tape attached to the only existing (photo)copy of the story. The bottom line of the caption on panel 3 reads "sewn into his vest."

CEREBUS BACKS TO THE OPPOSITE RAILING WHERE, WITH GRIM DETERMINATION HE HACKS AND SLASHES AT HIS ASSAILANTS...

AND WHERE A SWORD DOES NOT SUFFICE...

THE EARTH-PIG SNOUT FLIP SERVES IN ITS STEAD!

NIGHT BEGINS TO FALL AS THE LAST OF THE INVADERS IS ROUTED....
TARIM! THERE'S NO MORE AVID A TEAM OF SWORDSMEN THAN MERCHANTS DEFENDING THEIR SILKS AND SPICES!

AT LAST, THE DECK RUNNING RED WITH BLOOD, IT IS OVER...

'MERCHANT' EH?
IF YOU'RE A MERCHANT I'M A DONKEY'S UNCLE!

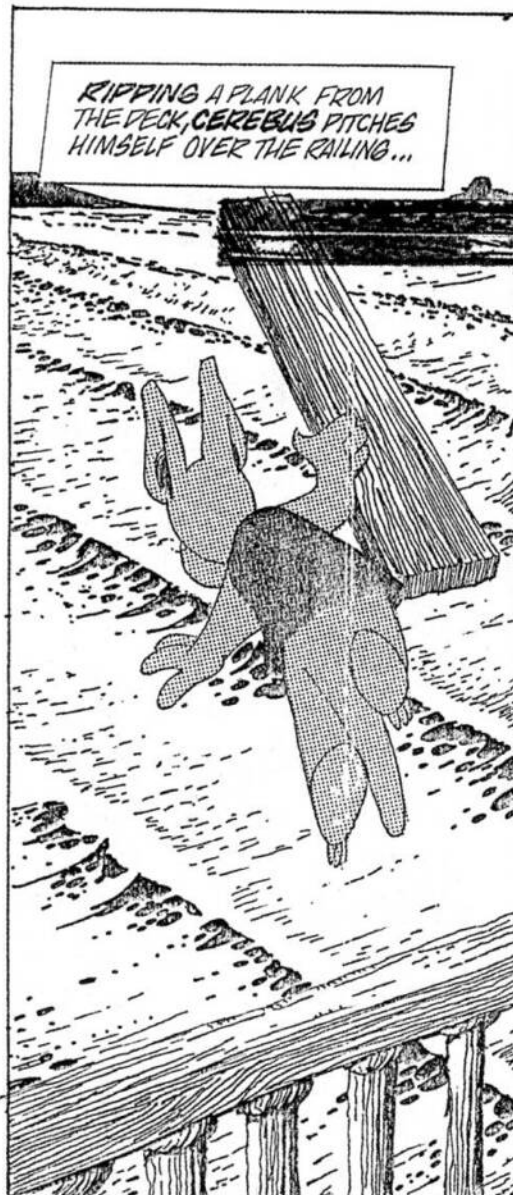
IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE YOU ON OUR SIDE... TARIM WILLING NOTHING ELSE WILL...

WE'RE NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET, CAPTAIN...

THESE WATERS! MAGIC ABORNING! I'VE SMELLED IT RIPENING SINCE YESTERDAY...

I HAVEN'T SMELLED ANYTHING. YOU'RE PROBABLY JUST OVERTIRED FROM ALL THE FIGHTING TODAY. YOU SHOULD GET SOME SLEEP..

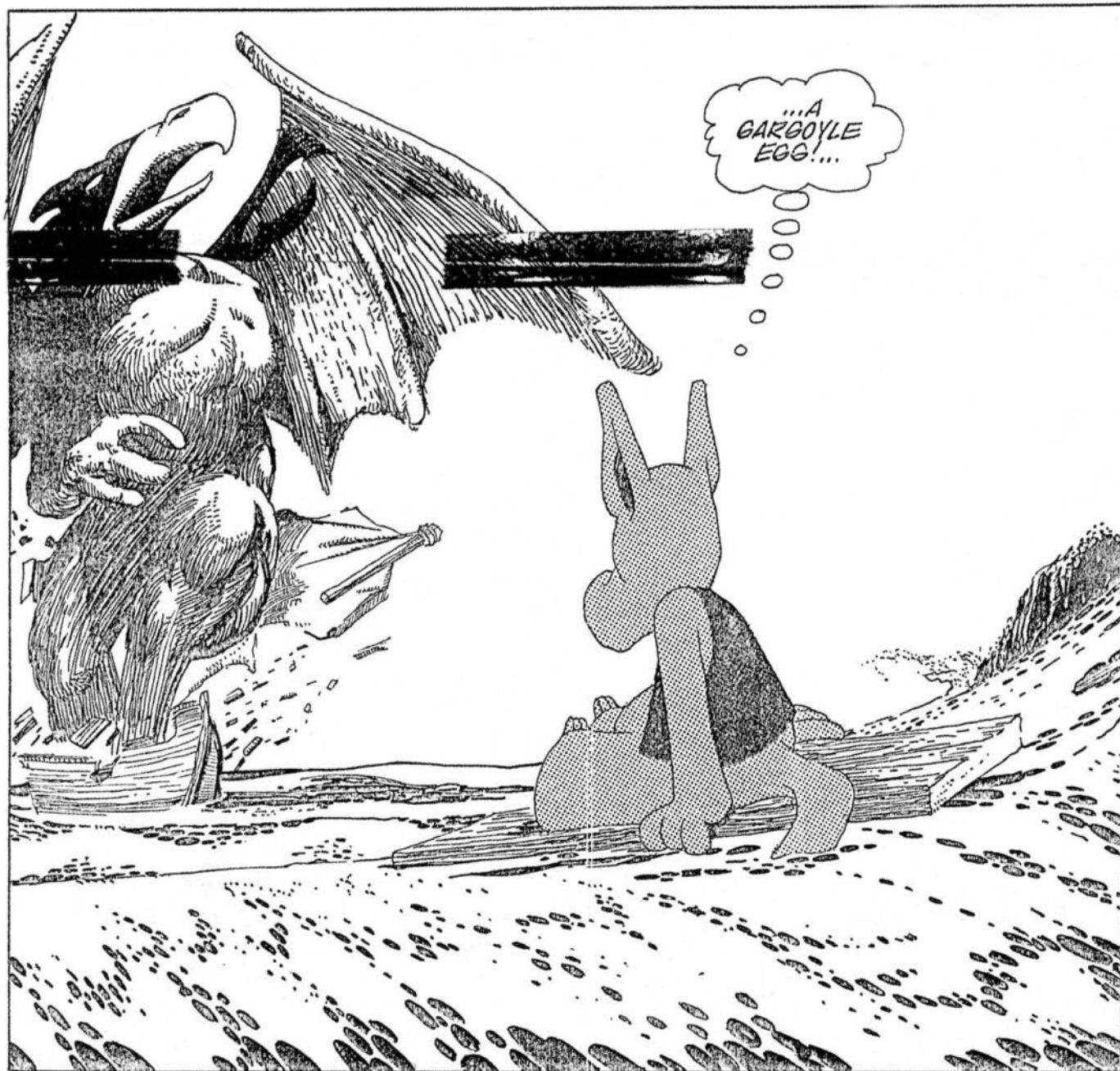
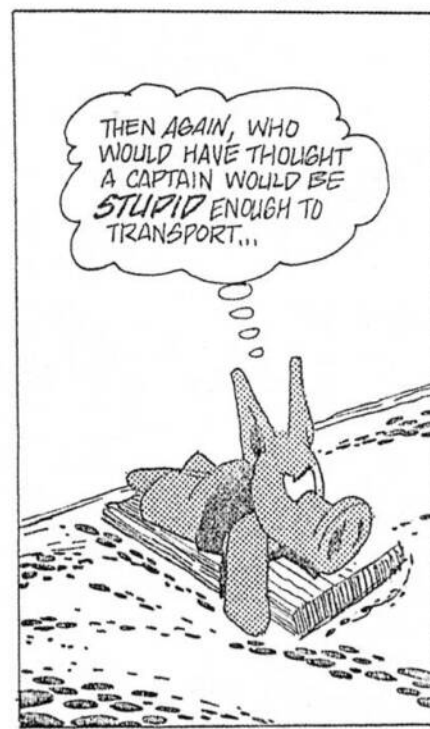
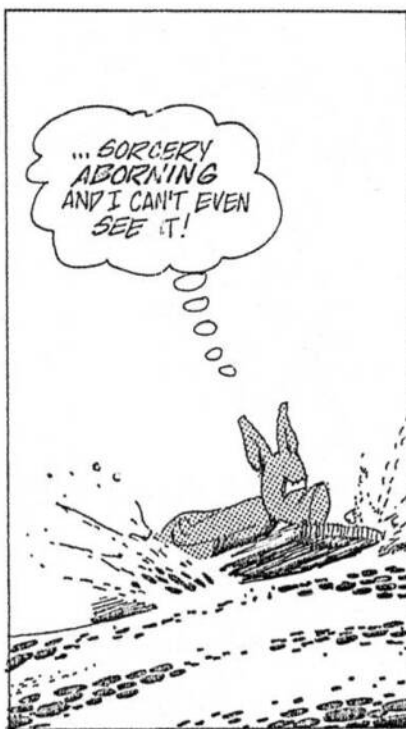
PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, CAPTAIN...
GOOD NIGHT.

Note: Panel four balloon reads "Aye! I always tell my customers the journey will [be?] two less days." Panel five reads "The nearest sorcerer is a customer of mine in Serrea..."

Note: panel four balloons read, "Two days overdue? Sorcery aborning?"

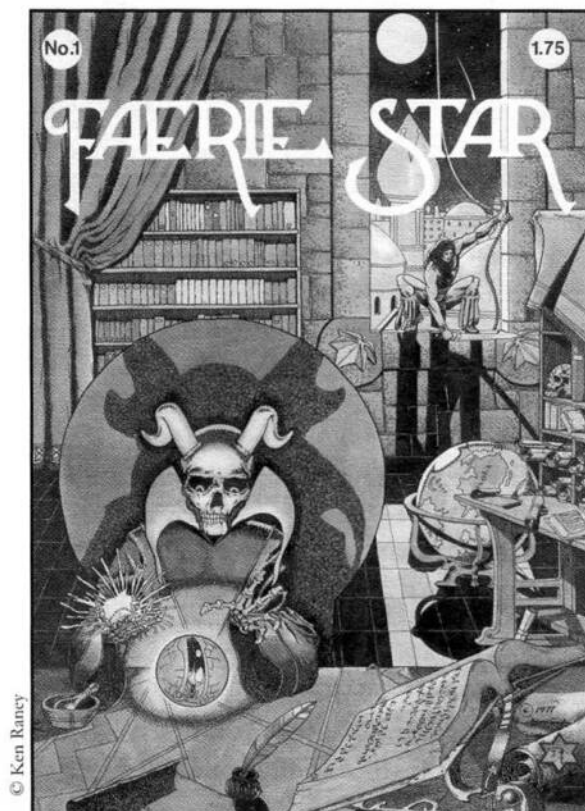
TARIM TAKE ME FOR A VAGRANT! HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO STUPID...?

...SORCERY ABORNING AND I CAN'T EVEN SEE IT!

THEN AGAIN, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT A CAPTAIN WOULD BE STUPID ENOUGH TO TRANSPORT...

...A GARGOYLE EGG!...

The splash page of Cerebus *4*

As Fred mentions, I attempted to darken the pages manually and realized that it was an impossible task. The line-work only *looked* black by contrast with the areas that were supposed to be solid black. As you can see, where solid black was added in various areas (the cloud of smoke on page one panel 2, the silhouette on panel 4, half of Cerebus' vest on page 2 panel 1, the shadow under the arm, page 2 panel 2, the railing in page 2 panel 5) it was so much darker than the line-work that the whole thing was irretrievably unbalanced. The problems were compounded with the results I was getting on most of page 3 and the bottom right panel of page 4 where I attempted to re-ink the lines in question and realized how different my drawing style was from three or four years before. As you can see, the story looks like very early Cerebus, and suddenly that panel looks like it's from the Palnu Trilogy era. Which raised the question: am I destroying the only example of a given artifact by updating the style of it, and how far do I want to go in that direction? I decided to stop and leave bad enough alone. It would be interesting to see if computer technology has come far enough to darken all of the linework and fill in the gray areas that were meant to be black without adding or subtracting anything, and I welcome anyone who wants to take a try at it to give it their best shot from these reproductions here.

Public Library at the time. This was back in the dark ages when photocopiers tended to print only thin lines. Solid black just tended to get burnt to a light gray with a patchy darker gray perimeter (which was all you needed for most library photocopies that consisted mostly of basic text).

Above: the splash page of Sim's Faerie Star *1 story.*
Left: the cover (art by Ken Raney).

About Last Issue by Dave Sim

The Editorial

Yes, I quite agree with Mark Frost as quoted here: "It's this weird thing...of how do you know when something's in your work and when it isn't? If someone sees it there—I mean, if they *see* it there, it must *be* there." There are limits, I think, as when long-time *Cerebus* reader Jeff Seiler maintained (and for all I know, still maintains) that New Joanne was actually Jaka even though it violated continuity. Somehow she was young even though everyone else had died decades before. Well, it's certainly his right to believe that, but I don't think it's sustainable, and it certainly undermines the intention I had with the story, but again, he bought the books, so he's entitled to read them whatever way he wants.

And I certainly agree that there are a lot of things that can be in a person's work that they have inadvertently—or (says crazy Dave Sim) which some larger motivating force of which they are unaware has intentionally—put in there. Along those lines:

Following the Trail of Something That Fell

Here's a very good example. Having already discussed the concept of "About Last Issue" with Craig, I'm going to try to compress my answer as much as possible (at a ridiculous extreme, we could end up with a situation where all of issue 2 is taken up with my reaction to issue 1). If any readers want an expanded answer, that could be addressed in future issues or as part of my monthly question-answering at groups.yahoo.com/group/cerebus (catchy name). But, at the outset, let me say that I'm not wholly convinced that "Something fell" isn't the singular obsession of a mere handful of *Cerebus* readers, and that it just so happened that one of those readers turned out to be the co-producer of *Following Cerebus.*

The motivation that I had at the time that I came up with it was that this Throne Room of the Eastern Church was a very ancient place, predating the Church itself. The best analogy I could draw would be to consider it as being roughly along the lines of the Vatican—had the entirety of Adam's expulsion from the Garden, Judaic prehistory, Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, the Davidic kingdoms, up through the Maccabees and on through the Synoptic Jesus' and the Johannine Jesus' confrontations with Pilate, the trials of Peter and Paul, the trial of Joan of Arc and the Scopes Monkey Trial all taken place inside the Vatican. You get the combination of the ancient and the resonant that way. One of the first things I thought was that a single edifice in which most of the significant events of human history had taken place would be an echo chamber on a grand scale. You could never be quite certain if you heard a sound in a distant chamber if it was something that was taking place at that moment, or something that had taken place at five year intervals over the course of the last six thousand years. In the secret councils of his sleep, does Pope John-Paul II hear the gladiators of Circus Maximus upon whose grounds the Vatican was constructed?

Now, what would be a sensible recurrent motif to anticipate in such a context? To me, it seemed that the louder the sound, the more likely it was to be heard echoing and re-echoing across the centuries and millennia. Particularly since an environment like the Vatican would have a hushed, library-like (well, as libraries used to be before they were turned into ancillary playgrounds) quality. Literal decades could go by without any sound above a whisper being heard. "Something fell" also seemed the most natural reaction to, after decades of silence, suddenly hearing BANG! "Something fell." It's just the human reaction. If I'm sitting here at the keyboard, and I hear BANG! from downstairs, that's my first thought. "Something fell."

My assumption was, in Cerebus' case, that being inside the Papal Throne Room would be a daunting experience, not only for himself, but for whatever-it-was that was inhabiting him, his guardian angel or his demon or whatever that magnifying force was. It would likely be the first experience of that whatever-it-was encountering something larger—*exponentially* larger—than whatever-it-itself-was. Larger not only in terms of space, but in terms of time. As I tried to indicate through the flashbacks, this was where the Popes and the Aardvarks and the Goddess handmaidens had their confrontations at the high-

est levels, first one dominant and then the other, taking turns being Jesus and Pontius Pilate, locked into this dualistic pattern of revolution and condemnation, sadism and execution, resonant event upon resonant event down through the thousands and thousands of years. So, the fact that "something fell" was this recurrent motif in the context and that Cerebus and the whatever-it-was both found themselves present when Pope Harmony IV is assassinated...

(and this would have been a disheartening truth to chew on in the upper reaches of the realm of spirit: even when a Pope and an Aardvark are able to meet in a completely non-confrontational way, the cycle of violence continues—some individual external to the model steps up with a crossbow)

...meant that this was now, not only an entrenched reality for Cerebus, but a reality for the larger entity within him (now seriously spooked by any loud BANG, now "set off" by the natural response to any loud BANG of thinking "something fell" and the Pavlovian response to those two occurring in sequence that "something really bad is about to happen"). If you are fortunate enough to leave the Papal Throne Room behind you—as exceptional a circumstance as the abdication of a king or a Pope—BANG "something fell" is something you take with you and carry with you the rest of your days. This is really the essence of most of the appearances of "something fell" after that point. Rick largely revives and transposes the relationship implied by the Throne Room by christening the large chair in the tavern The Seate of Truth. Again, the whatever-it-is inside of Cerebus begins to respond to the whatever-it-is inside of Rick which is perceiving their relationship in those terms, Rick's vivid belief in larger constructs superseding Cerebus' mundane perceptions, thus allow the whatever-it-is inside of Rick to supersede the whatever-it-is inside of Cerebus.

Now, my best assumption is that the BANG which echoes down the years is one of the series of BANGS which take place in *Reads* and which demolish the Papal Throne Room. Unbeknownst to everyone over this period of thousands of years is that the BANG they have been hearing is the sound of the Throne Room being demolished in the future: the BANG usually occurring in proximity to critical events in the cycle of violence as it's perpetuating itself. All of the condemnations and executions culminate in BANG. Years later, when I read the Gospels, this struck me as being resonant with—and a more extreme form of—the "Veil of the Temple being rent in twain" (the Veil that separated the "Holy of holies" inner Sanctum from the rest of the Judaic Temple) after the Synoptic Jesus' crucifixion. These seemed particularly resonant of and with the ultimate split between Cirin's outward bound half of the Throne dais and Cerebus' half. Not being aware of the Renting of the Veil in Twain (at the time), I would consider that to be a good example of something of which I wasn't aware being actively put into my story by beings or Being unknown.

In a comparable way—and there were intimations of this even at the time I was writing despite my complete ignorance of the scriptural references—this is a reference to Lucifer, "fallen like lightning from heaven". It is interesting to me that this predates my discovery of what I see to be the adversarial "he/she/it." Arguably, "something fell" aligns nicely with my much later analysis of Genesis 1:28, where *"God blessed them, and God said vnto them, Be fruitfull, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it"* (*Latter Days,* page 298), and which I see as being the point where the earth chose not to be an intelligent "he" but chose to be a stupid "it." That is, at the exact point where the rebel spirit—which I would maintain is what YHWH, the living thing inside the earth is—departs from God or turns away from God or falls from heaven or jumps or is pushed or flies or whatever illustration or metaphor you want to attach to it, a "he" becomes an "it." Therefore "something fell" is a good way to describe that rebel spirit, that seminal departure point of the rebel spirit. At the exact point that Lucifer fell, Lucifer stopped being a "he" and became an "it." "Something fell."

I also wouldn't rule out that I was unconsciously repeating the "falling" imagery that Craig and John document at encyclopedic length. I do think we're supposed to be progressing, rising as individuals so, at one level or another, most literature is going to have "descent" and "ascension" as underlying themes. Everyone is going to interpret "descent" and "ascension" different ways—the old Virginia Slims commercial, "You've come a long way, baby" didn't specify a vector—just as it seems to be endemic among those who are pathological "descenders" to deny that that's what they're doing. One of the underlying reasons, as an example, it is important for an alcoholic to admit that he or she has a problem in order to be treated for it. With good reason, it's described as a "descent" into alcoholism. Unless you admit that you're sinking, it's impossible for you to learn to swim.

It's also probably a good snapshot of the overall lack of progress we seem always to be making as a civilization that succeeding genera-

tions are called our "descendants." It's inconceivable to describe our successors as our "ascendants."

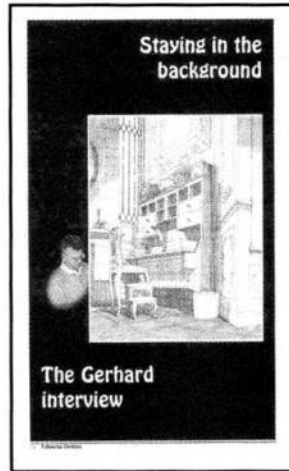
Gerhard's Interview

Well, there you go.

I had coffee with *Cerebus* reader (and soon-to-be publisher of a local weekly newspaper called *xen)* Sandeep Atwal the other morning and gave him the first copy of *Following Cerebus* that anyone had seen besides myself. And he was stopped (of course) by the illustrations for Ger's interview. And I'm watching him examining these illustrations, holding them up closer and closer and then holding them away from himself, and then flipping to the next ones. Finally he looks up at me and he says, "And he still hates his own work."

Yes. Yes. Exactly. Imagine what it was like to word day-in and day-out with someone who draws like that and thinks his work stinks on ice.

And they call ME a schizophrenic.

The list of locations that Ger compiled for the *Going Home* cover photos still exists somewhere under the metric tonne of material that will ultimately become the Cerebus Archive. Several of them were taken by his wife, Rose (hi, Rose!), since I asked him to bring in any photos that he thought could have been taken in Cerebus' world—i.e. no anachronisms visible. The cover to 234, as an example, is one that Rose took on a vacation to France, I believe. I'm not sure that a list of locations would take away the mystery. This might be a question on which it would be worth canvassing the readership. Maybe some obscenely wealthy *Cerebus* reader would like to travel the globe seeking out every location used as a *Going Home* cover.

Or not.

Shannon Wheeler's "Dave Sim" strip

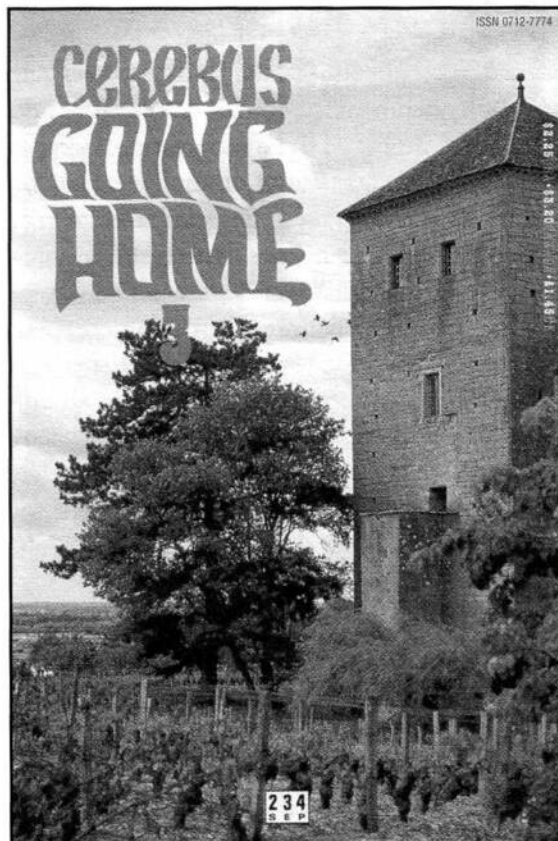
Had to laugh at this one. Repeatedly. What a great strip.

I didn't take offense when Shannon asked when the last issue of *Cerebus* would be coming out for the same reason I don't take offense when people apologize for not having read my work. It seems such a strange thing to apologize for. As far as I know the maximum number of people who have read my work is 37,000 (the circulation on issue 100) and that number is probably a lot closer to 15,000 and—in *Cerebus'* entirety?—probably closer to 85.

No, seriously.

All that 8 pt. type Torah commentaries in *Latter Days?* I'd be willing to bet that about 6,000 people would *claim* to have read it, but that the actual number is probably much closer to 85. Maybe 95. So, somewhere between 95 and 6,000 people. And there are, what? Nine billion people on the planet? The odds are very good that anyone I'm talking to anywhere at any time has never heard of me.

And if you factor in the comic-book field, in toto, and people who have done a Google search on my name in this feminist world of ours—whatever that number amounts to, say, a million, all they know about me is that I'm this crazy, evil misogynist.

In my own mental Google search of Shannon Wheeler, what I come up with is, 1) Austin Spirits stop exhibitor, 2) the only independent cartoonist who I ever heard was flattered to have

his character included in *Guys,* 3) the only established comic-book person—post issue 186—besides Bob Burden to phone to ask me if I were interested in working with him.

(The answer in both cases is, no. In no small part because I'm such an enthusiast of these guys' solo work. Anyone working with Bob Burden or Shannon Wheeler, to me, diminishes Bob Burden and Shannon Wheeler.)

Anyway, a great, great strip.

I only hope he doesn't suffer a backlash because of associating with me indirectly this way.

Another Thing Coming (News & More)

Just because I hate being left off of lists that I belong on, I'm going to be a real nit-picker and point out that Craig and John forgot to mention Jasen Lex, Dick Troutman and Brian Maruca, Rafal Gosieniecki, Marek Turek, Mariuz Zawadzki, and Krzysztof Kaluszka (you should've seen me at the ceremony trying to pronounce the names of the last four contributors to Matt Dembicki's *Attic Wit)* on the Day Prize Short List for 2004. Which is all right because, in issue 296, I forgot to include Chad Lambert's collaborator Joe Gravel on *Possum at Large.* Fortunately I remembered my mistake in time to get a second Short List plaque done (better to forget his name in the book than to forget to get him his plaque, as the ancients used to say).

On the Yahoo! Cerebus Mailing List photo: if you got the photo from Dan Parker, then the photographer in question is his lovely wife, Linda, from whom I just had a very nice two-page letter after she read about the free comic book deal on Neil Gaiman's weblog. Wanted it signed "to Dan," naturally. I live but to serve. Long-time readers of *Cerebus* will remember that Dan was hot-to-trot with a she-vixen named Meg Chase and that Linda finally sent a letter to Aardvark Comment basically saying that Dan was too good for Meg. Well, one thing led to another, and here they are. Husband and wife.

Remember you read about it in Aardvark Comment first, folks.

Top: Dave Sim and Chad Lambert at the Day Prize awards ceremony. Middle: Lambert displays Possum at Large *at S.P.A.C.E. (Small Press and Alternative Comics Expo). Bottom: Dan Parker and wife Linda (with friend Pork Chop Jones). Linda, by the way, took the photo of the Yahoo! Cerebus Mailing List members that appeared at the bottom of page 39 in* FC *1.*

Mind Games

It is one of those unhappy implications of worldwide feminism that one finds oneself in the situation of having to be "vouched for" by women....

[A good example is my recent conversations with Chester Brown about how he might be able to take the edge off of the envelope-pushing-breaking-of-taboos that was the stock-in-trade of the serialization of *Ed the Happy Clown,* which *Drawn & Quarterly* wants to re-release. When I suggested that he get some feedback from Kris—his girlfriend at the time he started the story—for an introduction, he mentioned that another of his ex-girlfriends, Toronto CBC leftist Sook-Yin Lee, had said that she fell in love with Chester after she read *Ed the Happy Clown.* Cutting to the chase, I suggested that if he could even get her to agree to let him run a quote on the back cover, "'I fell in love with Chester after I read *Ed the Happy Clown,'* Sook-Yin Lee, ex-girlfriend," that that would make him pretty much invulnerable

to the usual "hate crimes against women" crap he would otherwise be setting himself up for as the CBC's poster child graphic novelist in the aftermath of the success of *Louis Riel* now presenting the Marxist-feminist powers that be in this country with, shall we say, somewhere edgier material. To his credit, after mulling over my suggestion, Chet said (quite emphatically), "That would be *cheating*." A very good way of putting it. Our dialogue continues in a couple of weeks.)

That having been said, "Dave Sim and *Cerebus:* A View From a Broad" was most welcome—quite apart from whatever negligible capacity it might have for doing a stitch-and-mend job on the tattered remnants of my reputation at this late date.

There's a column that has been appearing in the Saturday *National Post,* written pseudonymously by a Toronto businesswoman who has decided that she's tired of the rat race and that she wants to find herself a millionaire to marry and is, therefore, documenting her efforts in that direction. I read a lot of this stuff. It's always been my experience that you will find out more about women in articles obviously not intended to be read by men than you will find out any other way. This turned out not to be a particularly notable example—it's basically a celebration of makeover materialism and "look what fancy-schmancy place I got to go last night" —but I persevered through the first couple of installments waiting to see if this whack-job might accidentally or inadvertently write something of interest. I think it was the third or fourth installment that had a sidebar of reactions from the readers. One in particular was quite lengthy and, in excruciating and coruscating detail, made scorched earth of this bimbo's delusions, both in finding a millionaire and in what she could expect if she actually landed one. Brutal and eloquent. Along the lines of John Lennon's "cruel but fair" observation, when informed that Elvis had died, that "Elvis died when he went in the army." Having seldom seen a more lucid slice-and-dice job on the *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* brigade, I naturally checked for the writer's name.

"E. Bardawill, Ottawa."

Hey, I thought. That's one of *mine!*

Excuse the knee-jerk possessiveness, Elizabeth, but you are, you know. In the larger sense. You're one of mine.

I also appreciate Elizabeth mentioning the "performance artist" who cuts himself and flicks his blood on other people's artworks in galleries getting a $15,000 Governor-General Award (since white men aren't allowed to criticize our female-visible-minority-G-G without being called racists and misogynists). That particular award was front-page news the same day the last issue of *Cerebus* managed to hit the stores without being mentioned in any Canadian media.

An irony that wasn't lost on either of us, by the looks of things.

Woman? Angel? Devil? Viper? Scorpion?

Look at that sweet face. No wonder the only logical answer to the above is, Who cares? Anyway, starting this issue, as a core part of the agreement in launching *Following Cerebus,* I get to choose "Dave Sim's favourite Buffy photo" from however many multitudes of candidates Craig sends me.

Sigh. What a great job I've got. This one? Hmmm. Or maybe this one? Or this one over here?

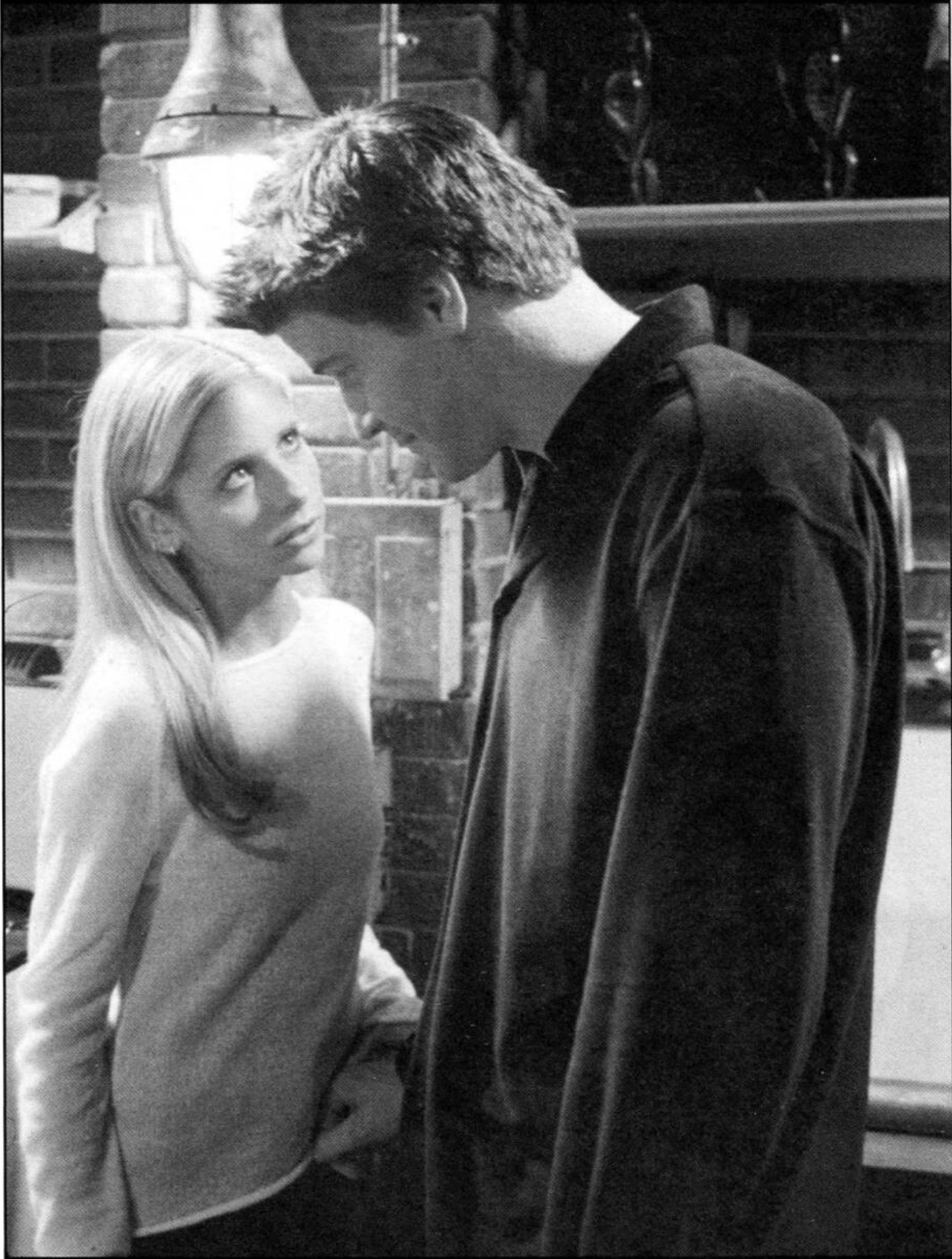
Editorial

(continued from inside front cover)

The blurry art reproductions are mostly our fault, we think. We'll see how they turn out when this issue comes back. We tried a different format and also have sent this issue to a different printer.

Other than that, we don't have much to say about this issue. The feature essay has a long and winding history that we will explain at another time. Also, it was a tough thing to describe in ads (as you'll see when you read it). It's not really about "storytelling techniques in *Cerebus*," which might have implied a Scott McCloud- or Will Eisner-type of analysis. But we couldn't think of a better way to say it in four or five words. Sorry if you were expecting the McCloud kind of thing. That will come at some point down the road. As it is, this is really just the first look at aspects of Sim's storytelling. We're already mentally outlining a follow-up that looks at how readers can (or cannot) alter a story by how they interact with the narrative.

For now, though, this is what we have. We hope you enjoy it.
Craig Miller
John Thorne

Dave Sim's Favorite Buffy Pic This Month

Who's the cobra, and who's the mongoose?
This is the scary thing about actresses even at a great remove. Having seen this expression on many female faces back in my dating days, this is unquestionably a "weighing of potential advantages and potential disadvantages," where she is uncertain of how strong she is or how weak she is in the situation. My instinct is to say that she isn't acting: she and the actor had a relationship of some kind, and that's coming out in the performance. She doesn't know if she has a stronger hold over him or he has a stronger hold over her. Or she *is* acting and drawing on a remembrance of that kind of delicate balance and is able to project that, even in a still photo. I can't even imagine why anyone would get involved with an actress for that very reason. They're like a bottomless well—an abyss—of "let's pretend." (Sarah Michelle Gellar and David Boreanaz from the first-season *Angel* episode "I Will Remember You.")

Another Thing Coming

NEWS & MORE

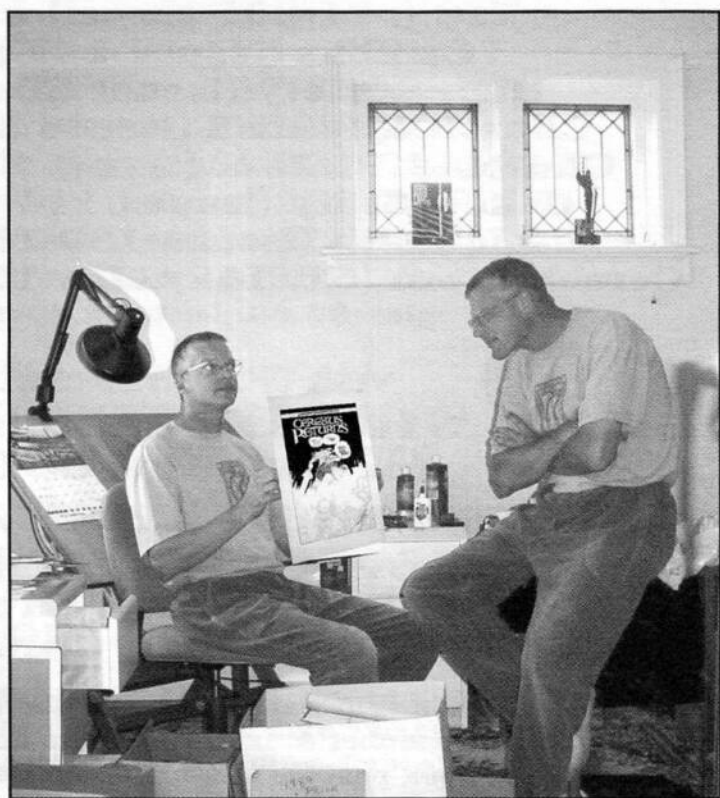
Cerebus CD Art

Dave Sim has authorized the Spermbirds (remember "Something to Prove" in *Cerebus* 112/113?) to use another Cerebus image on their album cover and to do t-shirts. Roger Ingenthron, the band leader had, evidently, been trying to find Sim for years and finally contacted him a few months ago. Seen here is the CD cover and the tour stops card with the t-shirt designs on the back. For more information, go to www.spermbirds.com.

SPERMBIRDS

SOMETHING TO PROVE

2004 Christmas Card

Here is the design for the 2004 Aardvark-Vanaheim Christmas card, along with the reference photos. Gerhard cloned himself in order to pose for both positions in the one photo. Enjoy!

CEREBUS
the first half

Cerebus (issues 1-25) $25
High Society (issues 26-50) $25
Church & State I (issues 52-80) $30
Church & State II (issues 81-111) $30
Jaka's Story (issues 114-136) $25
Melmoth (issues 139-150) $17
Cerebus Zero (51, 112/113, 137/138) $2.25
plus $5.00 per book postage

ORDER ONLINE AT
www.followingcerebus.com

VISA or MASTERCARD:
519 - 576-0955 (fax)
(or 519-576-0610)

or send cheque / money order to

AARDVARK VANAHEIM INC.
P.O. BOX 1674 STN. C
KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA N2G 4R2

include your name, address, phone number,
Visa or MasterCard number & expiration date and the name on the card.
Overseas add $8.00 per book postage and handling. Canadian customers add 7% GST

CEREBUS
the next half

Flight (issues 151-162) $17
Women (issues 163-174) $17
Reads (issues 175-186) $17
Minds (issues 187-200) $17
Guys (issues 201-219) $20
Rick's Story (issues 220-231) $17
Going Home (issues 232-250) $25
Form & Void (issues 251-265) $25
Latter Days (issues 266-288) $30
plus $5.00 per book postage

ORDER ONLINE AT www.followingcerebus.com

VISA or MASTERCARD:

519 - 576-0955 (fax)
(or 519-576-0610)

or send cheque / money order to

AARDVARK VANAHEIM INC.
P.O. BOX 1674 STN. C
KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA N2G 4R2

include your name, address, phone number,
Visa or MasterCard number & expiration date and the name on the card.
overseas add $8.00 per book postage and handling. Canadian customers add 7% GST

Tim Bradstreet! Frank Frazetta! Gary Gianni! Adam Hughes! Mark Schultz! Chris Sprouse! Drew Struzan!

Art (counterclockwise from top left) by and © Gary Gianni, Frank Frazetta, Mark Schultz, Tim Bradstreet, Chris Sprouse, and Adam Hughes. Drew Struzan holds down the center spot! Characters © their respective copyright holders.

Find them all (and Buffy too) in Spectrum!

Wrapped in Plastic

The world's longest-running magazine devoted to David Lynch, Mark Frost, and all things Twin Peaks continues on! Pick up some back issues today before they're gone forever!

THESE ARE U.S. BACK ISSUE PRICES!

For Canada: use these prices, but pay with Canadian postal money order in U.S. funds. **For foreign overseas orders: add $3.50** per copy for air mail shipping; pay with international money order in U.S. funds.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE!

***Wrapped in Plastic* Subscription Rates**
(one year/4 issues):
U.S.: **$19.50** (third class) or **$23.50** (first class)
Canada: **$24.00** (Canadian postal money order in U.S. funds)

See our Web site for more back issues!

www.wrappedinplastic.com

World Spins Online—news updates! Excerpts from WIP interviews! Complete cover gallery in color with content summaries! Press clippings of WIP reviews! Order back issues online! And more!

Order ONLINE at www.wrappedinplastic.com and www.spectrum-mag.com!

Or mail payment to address below:

All prices subject to change without notice. Make check or money order payable to

Win-Mill Productions (Dept. FC2), P.O. Box 1283, Arlington, TX

#41 (June 1999) - Comparison of *Twin Peaks/Picnic at Hanging Rock* and Lynch/Peter Weir. *TP* in Japan; Duchovny writes and directs *XF*! **$6.00** postpaid.

#42 (Aug. 1999) - Samuel and Rebecca Umland examine *Lost Highway*; *TP* Japanese Georgia Coffee commercials; Chris Isaak; *XF* season six! **$6.00** postpaid.

#43 (Oct. 1999) - Kimmy Robertson (Lucy) interview! Lynch Fest; Richard Beymer's rare *TP* photos; Duchovny *XF*-ish Australian commercial! **$6.00** ppd.

#47 (June 2000) - *WIP* compares Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* with Lynch's films! Kyle MacLachlan movie reviews, *X-Files* DVD! **$6.00** postpaid.

#53 (June 2001) - The final episode of *Twin Peaks* explained, with previously unpublished photos! Plus *All Souls*, *X-Files*! **$6.00** postpaid.

#55 (Oct. 2001) - 3 great interviews: Justin Theroux and Laura Elena Harring (*Mulholland Drive*) and Harley Peyton (*Bandits*)! Lynch Fest 2001! **$6.00** ppd.

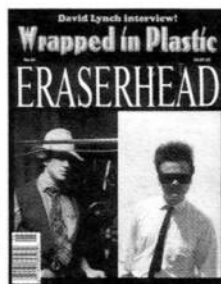
#56 (Dec. 2001) - Interview with Naomi Watts (*Mulholland Drive*)! Lengthy *M. Drive* analysis! Reviews of *From Hell* and Lucy Lawless's *X-Files*! Selling quickly **$10.00** ppd.

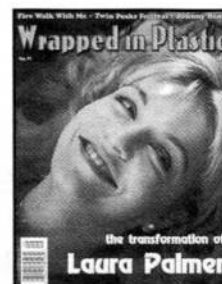
#57 (Feb. 2002) - Interviews with David Lynch, plus Richard Green and Geno Silva (from *Mulholland Drive*)! Reviews of *Peaks*, *FWWM*, and *X-Files* DVDs! **$6.00** ppd.

#58 (Apr 2002) - Interviews with David Lynch (about his new Web site) and *Peaks* writer Robert Engels! Review of new Chris Issak CD. **$6.00** postpaid.

#59 (June 2002) - Detailed ep. guide to the first season of *Twin Peaks*; guide to Lynch DVDs, survey of davidlynch.com, reviews of *24*, *The X-Files*! **$6.00** ppd.

#60 (Aug. 2002) - *Fire Walk With Me* essay on the film's 10th anniversary; *All Souls* episode guide; John Neff talks about *Blue Bob*; *X-Files* news! **$6.00** postpaid.

#64 (Apr 2003) - Chris Issak issue: his *FWWM* role; CD reviews; *Chris Isaak Show* season 1 ep. guide; Lynch interview (pt. 1); *Eraserhead* DVD review! **$6.00** postpaid.

#65 (June 2003) - Special *Eraserhead* issue! David Lynch interview (part 2), and a lengthy *Eraserhead* analysis! *X-Files* book review **$6.00** postpaid.

#68 (Dec. 2003) - Detailed episode guide to the second season of *Twin Peaks* covering episodes 2001-2009; *Twin Peaks* in Japan (part 3) with photos! **$6.00** ppd.

#71 (Sept. 2004) - Lengthy analysis of the Laura Palmer character in *TP* and *FWWM*; TP Festival 2004; *TP* Marathon; music of Johnny Reno and Chris Isaak! **$6.00** ppd.

Other great Win-Mill Productions publications!

Spectrum Magazine brings together some of the greatest names in Conan comics and illustration for one spectacular issue, **SPECTRUM SUPER SPECIAL #2!**

ON SALE NOW!

Spectrum Magazine
CONAN
SUPER SPECIAL

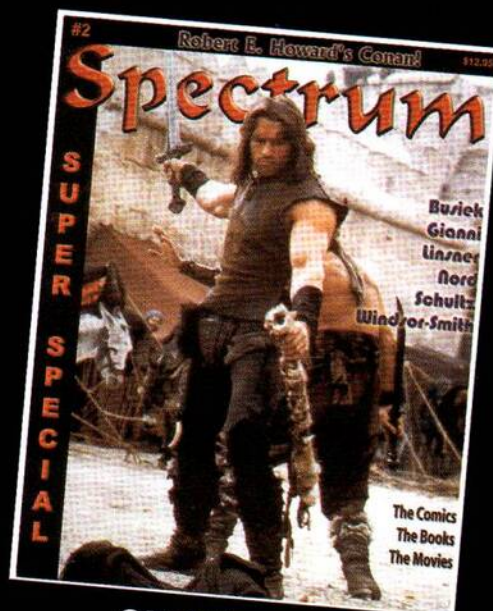
B. Windsor-Smith

All-new interviews:
- Kurt Busiek
- Gary Gianni
- Joseph Michael Linsner
- Cary Nord

Past interviews with different art:
- Mark Schultz
- Barry Windsor-Smith

Movie/DVD reviews:
- *Conan*
- *Conan the Destroyer*
- *Red Sonja*
- *Kull the Conqueror*
- *The Whole Wide World*

All this and more!

Deluxe squarebound format! Over **100 pages!** Cover price **$12.95**. (Add $5 shipping to U.S./Canada; add $10 foreign overseas if ordering directly from Win-Mill Productions below!)
ORDER ONLINE at www.spectrum-mag.com!

"You definitely have the correct approach for fantasy/comic book material. Both the reviews and the interviews have the same analytical bent that's been missing from the field all along."
—Dave Sim

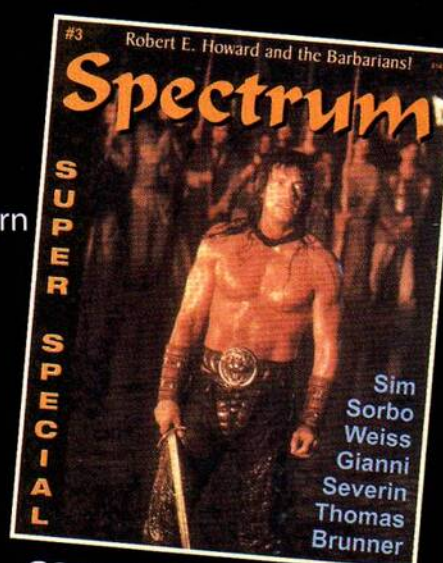
Heroic Fantasy Super Special!

Here it is—a second collection of Robert E. Howard-related interviews from past issues of *Spectrum*, plus **numerous all-new* interviews**!

***Frank Brunner** on Bran Mak Morn
Gary Gianni on Solomon Kane and Bran Mak Morn
***John Severin** on King Kull
***Dave Sim** on REH and Cerebus
Kevin Sorbo on King Kull and Hercules
***Roy Thomas** on REH's Marvel Comics
***Alan Weiss** on Solomon Kane

COMING IN JANUARY!

Deluxe squarebound format! Over **100 pages!**
Cover price **$14.95** (plus shipping)

Check our Web site **www.spectrum-mag.com** for more info and online ordering!

Win-Mill Productions (Dept. FC2), P.O. Box 1283, Arlington, TX 76004

Barry Windsor-Smith and Dave Sim
(1973)